PATTERNS OF POWER · THE MUGHAL EMPIRE

The Mughal Empire

The Complete Study · 1526 — 1579 — 1765

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with Claude (Anthropic) · 2026

held as tested, not revealed

Held as tested, not revealed.

A case study in the Patterns of Power series.
Primary sources quoted exactly; modern scholarship paraphrased and credited.
Contested figures given as ranges. Nothing reconstructed from memory.

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Preface and Outline

What the study is for, how it was built, and the discipline it holds

The spine

The question was set before the research began, and it was set as a practical problem rather than a thesis.

Every Muslim dynasty that had ruled from Delhi since 1206 had been formidable for about one lifetime. A strong sultan built; the succession destroyed what he built; five unrelated houses and some thirty rulers came and went across three hundred and twenty years, and not one of them handed an intact apparatus to an heir. Beneath all of them lay a Hindu formation so deep and so completely self-running that no conqueror had ever seriously proposed to touch it. So a newcomer with a small army, no home country and a claim by descent that meant nothing to nine-tenths of his new subjects faced a single compound problem: how to assemble a hierarchy out of Turks, Persians, Afghans, Indian Muslims and Hindu chiefs who despised one another; keep them from killing him; keep them from killing each other; and hand the whole thing to one heir without it coming apart.

Thomas J. Bryan's spine, held from the outset, was that the answer would be found in *positions* rather than in ideas — that the Mughal institutions would turn out to be people in power solving problems as they arose with the materials at hand, and that working with the Hindu elite would prove to be the intelligent move rather than the generous one.

The research bore that out, and then made it precise in a way the spine had not anticipated. The Mughal settlement is not one settlement but three, and the variable that sorts them is neither loyalty nor religion but *replaceability*. Where a substitute could be bought in the enormous market for military labour that the whole Persianate world constituted, the terms were as thin as that market allowed: rank issued by the emperor, lapsing at death, revenue rotated so no man could root himself, estate reclaimed to settle accounts. Where no substitute existed — a Rajput chief with a formed clan, a genealogy, a fortress and a country — the empire conceded the one thing it forbade everywhere else, gave him his homeland back as hereditary possession, and bought his service on top of it. And where the holder was both irreplaceable and already doing the work, the empire granted nothing at all: it registered what was there,

taxed through it, and wrote down in its own manual how many horse and foot it would face if it pushed too hard.

The record also refused the brief in three places, and the refusals were more useful than the confirmations.

It refused the colonial frame entirely. This project's instructions were written for European colonial conquests and predict a seam split by distance — a floor operating raw in the conquered country and a robe cut carefully for a metropolitan taxpayer. There is no metropole in this case, and the founder says so himself: Kabul and Qandahar and Badakhshan brought no reckonable profit and had rather to be reinforced. Nothing was ever remitted, because there was nowhere to remit to. The treasure of Delhi and Agra was distributed within three weeks — to the army by tribe, to the traders, to relations abroad, to shrines in Samarkand and Mecca, and a coin apiece to every soul in Kabul, man and woman, bond and free. What that removes is the geography of the seam. What it reveals is the variable underneath it, which is not distance but *whose belief is paying for the conquest*.

It refused the prediction that such an order runs on force and surveillance because its belief never took with the conquered — but only halfway, and the half it refused is instructive. The surveillance apparatus was enormous: fourteen recorders at court, a news-writer in every province, monthly returns on prices and rebels and the destitute poor, every trooper described in writing and every horse branded. And almost none of it was pointed at the population. It was pointed at the nobility. Surveillance is indeed the tell of a belief that never took; the direction it points identifies which population the belief failed with.

And it refused, from the first module onward, the assumption that the ruled were trapped. They were not. The conqueror wrote it down before he had governed a single monsoon: the crops are rain-grown, so a village needs no canal and can be re-founded elsewhere in a day and a half, and behind the thorn jungle the people of a district become stubbornly rebellious and pay no taxes. That single fact reorganised the study. It is why the floor of force was built against fortified places rather than against villages; why compliance had to be purchased with advances and remissions rather than extracted; why extraction had to run through hereditary intermediaries who could not run; and why, when the empire dissolved, the machinery that actually fed India did not dissolve with it.

How it was built

One module at a time, verification before writing, over the arc the Field Manual sets out: a landscape and twelve modules, each with a framework function, each contributing a refinement back to the framework rather than merely applying it.

Every load-bearing quotation, date and figure was checked against a source reproducing the primary text before it was written down. Public-domain primary sources are quoted **exactly**, at the length the argument needs, because the precise wording of a legal fiction is the point — Babur's memoir in Beveridge's translation, the *Ain-i-Akbari* in Blochmann's and Jarrett's, Bada'uni in Lowe's, Jahangir in Rogers and Beveridge's, Bernier in Constable's revision of Brock, and the Persian chronicles in Elliot and Dowson. Modern copyrighted scholarship is paraphrased and credited, never quoted at length; the *Fathnama-i Chittor*, which survives in English only in a modern translation, is summarised throughout rather than quoted. Where wording or provenance could not be confirmed, the line was dropped rather than guessed: the maxim commonly attributed to Ibrahim Lodi that kingship knows no kinship appears here as reported tradition and not as a quotation, because no primary text for it was found. Contested figures are given as ranges, and marked as the victors' arithmetic where that is what they are — which, for almost every casualty figure in this study, is what they are.

One problem of sources is large enough that it became a finding, and it is set out on the face of Module 11 rather than buried in a note. A great deal of the Mughal record accessible in English reaches it through eight volumes assembled by a servant of the East India Company who wrote in his preface that he hoped the translations would make Indian readers more sensible of the advantages of British rule. The passages are real and the scholarship since has not overturned most of them. The selection was made by a man who told us in advance what he wanted it to accomplish, and a grim accounting that does not say so is a downstream product of somebody else's.

The discipline

Legibility is not pardon.

To explain how an order held, and why it held so cheaply, is not to grant that it was just. To show that Akbar's curiosity was real, that the abolition of the *jizya* cost genuine revenue and bought nothing tangible, that Abu'l Fazl's sovereignty above all sects is a serious idea seriously held, and that the *varna* order the Mughals found was itself the residue of an earlier conquest that had become the furniture of reality — all of this is set down because it is the mechanism, not because it is a defence. Equally, to

record that a pillar of heads was raised at Chanderi, that non-combatants were killed at Chittor on the emperor's order after the fighting had ended, that peasants' children were carried off for revenue arrears, and that the only institution capable of telling an emperor no was subordinated in the empire's most creative reign, is not to withhold credit for what the order actually achieved.

A study that cannot credit what an order did has stopped measuring anything. A study that swallows the order's account of itself has stopped being a study.

Both columns stand. Neither cancels the other. The last module states the strongest case for the Mughal empire at full strength — the longest peace northern India had known since the Guptas, the highest real wages it would see for three centuries, a nobility a fifth of which was Hindu, and seven generations where every predecessor had managed one — and then answers it without flinching, on the finding that the achievement and the failure are the same fact.

The arithmetic is laid out. The sum is left to the reader.

The arc

Landscape · The Carpet and the Appanage. The two orders on the eve — a Hindustan whose sultan sat on a carpet and would not let his nobles stand, and a Timurid world that divided its patrimony among every son. Both failing at the same joint, over a country neither of them had ever formed.

1 · A Pillar of Heads and a Covered Way. *The floor of force.* Panipat lasted half a day and settled nothing. The floor took fifty years and was laid by siege engineering — and the conqueror who swore his army on the Quran wrote privately that the plan worked admirably.

2 · Proprietor of Every Acre. *The settlement.* A nobility that owned nothing and could be unmade with a pen; one hereditary exception, carved deliberately for the one group that could not be replaced; and a rural gentry whose right was bought and sold in a kingdom where, on the theory, there was nothing to sell.

3 · Without the Intermediate Assistance of Any One. *The robe.* Universal peace was not a policy of tolerance but a sovereignty claim, and tolerance was its by-product. The document that stripped the ulama of their veto was drafted by a cleric and signed by clerics.

4 · They Had Kept This Shop Warm. *Formation.* An imperial curriculum with no school system; a calendar that failed completely as an era and survives to this day as a harvest reckoning; and an emperor who watched a formation he could neither absorb nor kill, and reached for the sword.

5 · Though the Peasant Should Starve or Abscond. *The cost column.* The cultivator could walk into the thorn, and everyone knew it, so his compliance had to be bought. The empire's own manual instructs the collector to punish — and not to be afraid the land will fall waste.

6 · Come at Length to be Swallowed Up. *Extraction.* Four rupees in five never reached the treasury. The world's silver flowed in and stayed. And by assessing in cash the empire manufactured a class of bankers it could not command.

7 · Laid Before the Emperor, and Approved by Him. *Information and suppression.* A state that recorded the bets placed on its animal fights, and let the subject of the record correct it before filing — and an emperor who entered the murder of the official historian as the reason for a promotion.

8 · I Too Stand Behind Him? *Elite coordination and the default.* Rank was a place in a line, which is why five mutually hostile ethnicities held the arrangement up. It is also why a rising power could never be admitted without demoting somebody already inside.

9 · Come to This Chain and Shake It. *Plurality or foreclosure.* Thirty yards of pure gold and sixty bells, and no protection behind them. What accreted in two centuries was not a right but a habit of writing things down and having them sealed.

10 · Fourteen Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety-Nine. *Change and collapse.* Four risings from below and four annihilations. What ended the empire was a nobility that multiplied eightfold against a fund that did not — and officers who kept every imperial form and stopped remitting.

11 · The Mildness and the Equity of Our Rule. *The grim accounting.* The largest entry in the ledger falls after the arrangement ended, and the note was called by a replacement rather than by an absence. And the archive of the violence was assembled by a man who wrote down what he wanted it to accomplish.

12 · The Door That Could Not Widen. *Convergence and divergence.* Rome's door widened until the category dissolved; this one was genuinely open and structurally incapable of widening, because it opened onto a queue. The strongest case for the empire, stated in full, and answered.

LANDSCAPE

The Carpet and the Appanage

The ground before Panipat — a Hindustan whose sultan could not make his own nobles stand, and a Timurid world that divided its patrimony among every son; two orders failing at the same joint, over a country neither of them had ever formed

Two landscapes, and a missing third

Every study in this collection begins by reconstructing the ground a conquest fell on — who held organised violence, how the wealth was settled, what story the population had been formed to believe was rightful — so that the conquest can be read as an act performed against a real prior order rather than upon empty scenery. A conquest mounted from outside doubles that requirement: the land invaded and the land that sent the invader both have to be put on the page, because a conqueror is a man who answers to an audience the conquered will never see.

Here the doubling holds and the audience does not, and it is worth establishing that at the outset because everything downstream depends on it. The man who crossed the Indus in December 1525 had no metropole. He said so himself, in a passage where he sets his own position beside those of the two previous conquerors from beyond the passes, Mahmud of Ghazni and Muhammad of Ghur — *"I am the third"* — and then draws the distinction that matters. Mahmud, he notes, had the throne of Khurasan behind him and the ruler of Samarkand under his hand; Muhammad of Ghur had no Khurasan himself but his elder brother held it. Babur had Badakhshan, Qunduz, Kabul and Qandahar, and of them he writes that *"no reckonable profit came from them, rather it was necessary to reinforce them fully because several lie close to an enemy."* There was no treasury at home voting him credits, no taxpayer whose belief in the enterprise had to be maintained, no ministry whose despatches would have to be worded carefully. There was a mountain principality that cost more than it yielded, an Uzbek power at his back that had already taken everything his family once held, and twelve thousand men.

What that removes from the case is the seam this collection usually pries at hardest — the geographical split between a floor operating raw in the conquered country and a robe cut carefully for the people back home. What it does not remove is the problem the seam exists to manage, because the belief Babur had to keep was his own army's, and his army was not a captive audience. It was two or three months' march from its families, it had just lost a great many men to a hot Indian summer, and within weeks of

the victory the greater part of his commanders wanted to go home. That conversation, recorded in his own memoir, is the closest thing this case has to a metropolitan debate, and it was settled in a tent at Agra rather than in a capital across the sea: *"Was it for us to remain in Kābul, the sport of harsh poverty?"* The audience whose conviction funded this conquest was standing in front of the conqueror, armed, and free to leave.

So the two landscapes to be built are Hindustan on the eve, and the Timurid world that produced the man who took it. The first is much the deeper of the two, and it has to be read not as one order but as a stack.

Landscape I — Hindustan on the eve

The layer that had stopped looking built

Begin at the bottom, because that is where the durability was, and because the conqueror's own eye went there first. Describing the country in his memoir, Babur set down as a plain matter of observation a fact about how Indian society allocated work: *"every artisan there is follows the trade that has come down to him from forefather to forefather."* He noticed, too, that the categories ran the opposite way from the ones he knew — in his countries it was the nomads of the wilds who carried tribal names, whereas here it was *"the settled people of the cultivated lands and villages"* who did. He was looking, without a vocabulary for it, at the jati order: a dense, local, hereditary allocation of occupation, marriage, food and rank, administered by nobody in particular and enforced by everybody, with Brahmin ritual authority at its apex and the village as its working unit.

This is the deepest and most important fact about the country the Mughals were about to try to govern. The apparatus that told an Indian cultivator who he was, what work was his, whom he could marry, what he owed and to whom, was not the state's. It had not been built by the Sultanate, it did not depend on the Sultanate, and it would not notice the Sultanate's disappearance. A conqueror who took Delhi took a city, a treasury and a tax claim; he did not take the thing that formed people, because that thing was not in Delhi and had no seat in it.

None of which makes the order timeless, and the discipline of this project forbids treating it as though it were. It was built, and the record of its building is legible. The varna scheme belongs to the Vedic corpus of the Indo-Aryan-speaking peoples who spread across the north-west and the Gangetic plain from roughly the second millennium BC, over a substrate that included the ruins of the Harappan cities and populations who spoke other languages entirely; the Brahmanical synthesis that turned those categories into a full social and legal ordering was worked out across the centuries

either side of the beginning of the common era; and the accommodation of local, tribal and foreign groups into the scheme went on continuously for a thousand years after that. The sharpest single piece of evidence is the ruling class the Mughals would spend a century negotiating with. Modern scholarship on the origins of the Rajputs — B. D. Chattopadhyaya's work is the standard statement — reads "Rajput" not as an ancient bloodline but as a status open, in the early medieval centuries, to lineages that had acquired land and armed followers: pastoral chiefs, tribal leaders, families of mixed and foreign descent, absorbed into Kshatriya rank through the good offices of Brahmin genealogists who supplied solar and lunar pedigrees, and, where those would not stretch, the Agnikula legend of clans born from a sacrificial fire on Mount Abu. Chattopadhyaya's most telling observation is about the discarded scaffolding: a Pratihara inscription of the earlier ninth century still explains the family's origin through a transitional Brahman-Kshatriya status, and one from a generation later has quietly dropped the explanation, the clan by then having enough power that its Kshatriya-ness no longer needed arguing.

That is a conquest naturalised, caught in the act, in stone. And it is exactly why the naming of it must not slide into debunking. By 1526 a Sisodia of Mewar was a Kshatriya in the only sense that has ever mattered — his peers believed it, his enemies believed it, he believed it, and men would shortly die in thousands at Khanwa on the strength of it. A thing that was built and then took is more durable than a lie, not less, and the whole difficulty the Mughals were about to inherit is that the order beneath them was of exactly this kind: authentically the country's world, cheap to itself, needing no garrison, and belonging to no throne.

The layer with the swords: rais, rajas and zamindars

Above the village and beneath the throne stood a layer of hereditary intermediaries who held superior rights over the produce of particular tracts and kept armed retainers to enforce them. Irfan Habib's reconstruction of the agrarian order — the standard account, worked chiefly from later Mughal material — establishes the essentials: zamindari right was hereditary, saleable, distinct from the peasant's right to cultivate, and backed by the holder's own men; at the larger end it shaded into the autonomous chief who was a ruler in all but name. Peter Jackson, writing on the Sultanate, translates the Persian chroniclers' *mawasat* as "sub-kingdoms" and shows them interspersed through the territory the Sultanate claimed, so that the map of Delhi's authority was never a solid block but a set of roads, towns and tax-corridors with unabsorbed lordships between them.

Babur met this layer within months, and, characteristically, wrote down its price. His revenue list for the countries he held in 1528, from Bhira to Bihar, totals fifty-two *krurs* of tankas, and he notes that *"Eight or nine krūrs of this are from parganas of rāīs and rājas who, as obedient from of old, receive allowance and maintenance."* Roughly one rupee in six of the new empire's assessed revenue was already committed, before anything else, to buying the acquiescence of hereditary chiefs whom the conqueror found in place and did not propose to remove. He also recorded the arithmetic the country itself used to convert revenue into force — a *lak* of revenue reckoned to yield a hundred horsemen, a *krur* ten thousand — which is a way of saying that in Hindustan land and cavalry were the same quantity written twice, and that anyone who held revenue held soldiers.

That is the second layer, and the essential thing about it is that it was not vacant. There were seats here, and they were occupied, hereditarily, by men with their own retainers. A newcomer could rent them; he could not sit in them.

The layer that was empty in an afternoon

The order at the top was itself a conquest — the Ghurid campaigns of the late twelfth century, consolidated after 1206 by Turkish slave commanders who had been left in India when their master's dynasty fell apart behind them — and it had been in place for three hundred and twenty years. What it had not managed, in all that time, was to transmit power.

The conventional list gives some thirty-one rulers between 1206 and 1526, across five dynasties unrelated to one another: the so-called slave or Mamluk line, the Khaljis, the Tughluqs, the Sayyids, and finally the Lodis. The pattern inside those dynasties is the one that matters here, and it recurs with a regularity that reads less like misfortune than like a design fault. Iltutmish, the real builder of the Sultanate, died in 1236 having reigned twenty-five years; his son held the throne for under seven months, his daughter Raziyya for under four years before she was deposed, and the next two occupants for two years and four years respectively, before a grandson reigned two decades as the creature of the commander who eventually replaced him. Alauddin Khalji, whose reign of twenty years was the Sultanate's high-water mark of centralised extraction, had himself come to the throne in 1296 by murdering the uncle whose daughter he had married; within four years of his death his dynasty was extinguished, its last sultan murdered in 1320 by a favourite who was in turn killed by the founder of the next house. Firuz Shah Tughluq ruled thirty-seven years and died in 1388; his realm came apart within a decade, and in 1398 Timur — Babur's ancestor — sacked Delhi and left it a ruin from which it took generations to recover. The Sayyids who followed governed

a rump. Each of these men, in his own lifetime, was formidable; not one of them could hand what he had built to a successor intact.

The Sultanate's own answer to the problem inside the hierarchy is worth naming precisely, because it was intelligent and it failed anyway. It ran on military slavery: the sultan's *bandagan*, purchased, raised and promoted by him personally, owing everything to him and possessing no lineage that could compete with his. Iltutmish's corps of such men — remembered as the Forty — was the instrument of his consolidation and then, after his death, the body that made and unmade his children. Firuz Shah is reported by the chronicler Shams-i Siraj Afif to have accumulated a hundred and eighty thousand royal slaves, forty thousand of them in attendance at court, with provincial governors under standing orders to forward the best of them as part of the annual gift. It is the classic prevention solution, run at enormous scale: keep the men who hold the swords rootless and unable to found houses, so that capacity can never harden into claim. And its price was the price that solution always exacts — the corps that cannot found a dynasty of its own becomes, at every succession, the body that decides who does.

Over all this lay a robe that was borrowed from very far away. In 1229 Iltutmish received a letter of investiture and robes of honour from the Abbasid caliph al-Mustansir in Baghdad, and the Delhi sultans thereafter placed themselves nominally under caliphal aegis without ever claiming religious authority in their own right. Consider what that arrangement is: a legitimating recognition granted by a figure two thousand miles away, addressed to an audience of the sultan's own Muslim soldiers, officials and ulama, and of no interest whatever to the great majority of the people actually being taxed. The Sultanate's robe was cut for the men inside its own tent.

Toward the population outside it, the claim was confessional and, in the chroniclers' hands, triumphal. A verse preserved in the *Tarikh-i Daudi*, praising Sikandar Lodi's reign, states the ordering as plainly as it can be stated: *"The Musulmāns were dominant, the Hindus depressed, / And no one knew the tribe of Mughals even by name."* But the same chronicle, a few pages earlier, records what the arrangement looked like in practice, and the gap between the two is the most useful thing in the book. Sikandar, before his accession, is said to have proposed to go to Thanesar and massacre the Hindus assembled at the pilgrimage tank there, and to have been talked out of it by the chief of his own ulama, who asked him what previous Muslim sovereigns had done and was told *"that up to his time they had left the Hindus unmolested"* — and who then told him it would be improper to destroy an ancient temple or forbid the customary ablutions. The prince put his hand on his dagger, threatened to kill the scholar first, and, being refused, revealed what the expedition had actually been for: *"If you had*

permitted me to do this, many thousands of Musulmāns would have been placed in easy circumstances by it." The piety is on the surface and the plunder is directly beneath it, in the chronicle's own words, with the chronicler apparently seeing nothing to conceal. Set the verse beside the episode and the shape of the Sultanate's relation to the country is visible: a confessional claim maintained for the record and for the faithful, and an operating practice of leaving the mass of the population alone, because leaving it alone was what kept the revenue coming.

The carpet: what the Afghans had made of kingship

The house Babur actually fought was the last and in some ways the strangest of the five. The Lodis were Afghans, and Afghan kingship as they practised it was not the Turkish-Persian article at all.

The founder, Bahlul, took Delhi in 1451, and the *Tarikh-i Daudi* describes his conduct of the office in terms no Persian mirror-for-princes would recognise. *"In his social meetings he never sat on a throne, and would not allow his nobles to stand; and even during public audiences he did not occupy the throne, but seated himself upon a carpet."* He addressed his nobles in writing as *masnad-i ʿali*, the exalted seat — a title, not a form of address to a subordinate. *"Whatever came into his possession, in money, goods, or new parganas, he distributed it all among his troops, and reserved nothing whatever for himself."* And when his chiefs were displeased with him he would go to their houses, unbuckle his sword and lay it before the offended man, sometimes remove his turban, and say: *"If you think me unworthy of the station I occupy, choose some one else, and bestow on me some other office."*

Whatever the chronicler's flattering intent, that is a description of a constitution. The Lodi sultan was the first among the heads of Afghan clans; the realm was held in *iqta* by those clans; the treasure was distributed rather than accumulated; and the sultan's tenure was, in the plainest possible language, a matter of his peers' continued willingness to have him. His son Sikandar, who moved the working capital to Agra early in the sixteenth century, tightened this considerably. His grandson Ibrahim, who succeeded in 1517, set about converting peers into servants outright — the demand that nobles stand, the insistence that the office be treated as sovereign rather than shared — and the tradition ascribes to him the maxim that kingship knows no kinship, though the phrase belongs to the later Indian textbooks rather than to any wording this study has been able to verify in a primary text.

The result was neither submission nor a stable autocracy but defection. Rebellion ran through the eastern provinces; the sultan's own uncle, Alam Khan, was in exile in Gujarat pressing a rival claim; and Daulat Khan Lodi, who had governed the Punjab

from Lahore for the better part of two decades, opened correspondence with Kabul. The men who fetched Babur into India were not a subject population seeking deliverance. They were the settlement's own beneficiaries, defending a constitution their sultan was breaking, and they expected to use the Timurid as a hammer and then put him back in his box.

Two further details from the same chronicle deserve holding, because they set the fiscal ground the Mughals would inherit. Ibrahim's reign was remembered for extraordinary cheapness of grain, and the *Tarikh-i Daudi* explains it by an edict: the sultan had ordered *"that his chiefs and nobles of every degree should take nothing but corn in payment of rent, and no money was to be taken from the cultivators on any account,"* with the consequence that grain piled up in the assignments and the nobles dumped it at whatever it would fetch. And in the same passage: *"Gold and silver were only procurable with the greatest difficulty."* The pre-Mughal countryside was a place where the state's claim was taken in kind because the cultivator had no coin, and where the assignment-holder, not the treasury, was the party who met the peasant.

The thorn jungle: why the cost column was not full

Here is the feature of this landscape that decides what kind of order could be built on it, and it is not one the framework's expectations would have predicted. Babur, describing Hindustan before he had governed a single monsoon there, wrote down two observations that between them describe an escape hatch:

"In many parts of the plains thorny jungle grows, behind the good defence of which the people of the pargana become stubbornly rebellious and pay no taxes."

And:

"In Hindūstān hamlets and villages, towns indeed, are depopulated and set up in a moment! If the people of a large town, one inhabited for years even, flee from it, they do it in such a way that not a sign or trace of them remains in a day or a day and a half."

He then explains, with an engineer's clarity, why re-founding is so cheap: settlers *"need not dig water-courses or construct dams because their crops are all rain-grown,"* the population is enormous and swarms in, grass and wood are unlimited, huts are made — *"and straightway there is a village or a town!"*

Set that beside the orders this collection has examined where the ruled could not move: the Egyptian fellah on a canal that only the state could maintain, the Andean community inside a tribute system that had recorded it, the colonial subject fenced by a pass law. In the Indo-Gangetic plain of 1526 the ordinary cultivator's cost column was not full. His agriculture was rain-fed, so the state held no hydraulic chokepoint over him; land was abundant relative to labour, so his hands were worth more than his acre

and there was somewhere to take them; and the ravines and thorn scrub of the Doab and Bundelkhand offered a defensible refuge within a day's walk. The conqueror knew all this before he had a revenue system, and he wrote it down as a defect of the country.

Two consequences follow, and they will run through the whole study. First, the pressure on the extraction is not "how hard can the peasant be squeezed" but "how do we make him stay and pay at all" — which pushes an apex toward routing its demand through people who are already inside the village and cannot themselves run, which is to say through exactly the hereditary layer described above. Second, an order in this position cannot rely on the classic trap. Its problem is not a docile base but an evasive one, and its real fight, always, is with the intermediaries.

How many people were in question is not knowable for 1526. For 1600 the estimates diverge widely — W. H. Moreland worked from the cultivated area to about a hundred million for India as a whole, while Shireen Moosvi's revision of the same kind of evidence puts it between a hundred and forty and a hundred and fifty million, preferring a hundred and forty-five — with the empire itself somewhere between sixty and a hundred million on the same competing methods. Whatever the true figure, the ratio is the point: an incoming military caste numbering in the low tens of thousands, over a population in the tens of millions, on land that could not be fenced.

Who was doing the forming

Nothing in the country's apparatus of belief belonged to the throne. For the Hindu majority, formation ran through the village, the lineage, the jati and the Brahmin, and through a devotional landscape of temples, tanks and pilgrimage places — the Thanesar tank, whose worshippers a Lodi prince had once contemplated massacring for their portable wealth, being one such — none of which the Sultanate had built and none of which it could administer.

For Indian Muslims, formation ran overwhelmingly through the Sufi shrine rather than the court. The Chishti order, which became the dominant silsila of the north, made a virtue of distance from the state: Muʿin al-Din Chishti settled at Ajmer and died there in 1236; Nizamuddin Auliya, who died at Delhi in 1325, is remembered for refusing the patronage of sultans whose city he lived in. Their *khanqahs* fed and sheltered anyone, required no Persian and no lineage, and their tombs became the actual pilgrimage geography of Indian Islam. Richard Eaton's work on Bengal makes the mechanism concrete at the frontier: Islam spread there not behind an army but with shrine-centred settlements as forest was cleared into rice land, the holy man's establishment functioning as the institution around which a new agrarian community organised itself.

And a third channel was running hard in exactly these decades. The devotional movements gathered under the name *bhakti* were producing teachers who addressed the ordinary person directly, in the vernacular, over the heads of both Brahminical ritual and Muslim law — Kabir, traditionally placed in the fifteenth century, whose verses attack the pretensions of pandit and mullah with equal contempt; Guru Nanak, born in 1469 in the Punjab, who would witness Babur's campaigns in person and whose account of them survives in the Sikh scripture; Chaitanya in Bengal, born 1486. The country was full of vigorous, self-supporting institutions for the formation of belief, and the Sultan of Delhi controlled none of them.

The conclusion this forces is the one that governs the modules to come. When Ibrahim Lodi was killed at Panipat, nothing in the country's formation cracked with him, because his throne had never been carrying any of it. What his death vacated was a tax claim and a capital.

And the rest of India

One more correction before crossing to the other landscape: Hindustan was not India, and the men in Delhi had not ruled India for two hundred years. Babur put it exactly, writing of the earlier conquerors: *"all Hindūstān was not under one supreme head (pādshāh), but each rāja ruled independently in his own country."*

What the Lodis held in 1526 was the Punjab, the Ganges-Jumna Doab and the north Indian plain to the borders of Bihar, and they held that unevenly. Beyond it lay a set of fully independent states, most of them fragments of the Sultanate's own imperial past: the Bengal sultanate in the east; Gujarat, rich on Indian Ocean trade, in the west; Malwa in the centre; Sindh under the Sammas; Kashmir; Khandesh. In Rajasthan and its marches the Sisodia house of Mewar under Rana Sanga, who had held Chittor since 1509, had beaten Malwa and Gujarat in the field and clashed repeatedly with Delhi, and could put a confederacy of Rajput houses and disaffected Muslim lords into a single army — as he shortly would. Across the Narmada, the Bahmani sultanate that had ruled the Deccan since 1347 was in the last stage of dissolving into the five successor states of Bijapur, Golconda, Ahmadnagar, Bidar and Berar. And south of the Krishna stood Vijayanagara, at its height under Krishnadevaraya, who reigned from 1509 to 1529 — a great, wealthy, temple-building Hindu empire that had nothing to do with Delhi, would not encounter the Mughals for a century and a half, and is the standing reminder that the story told from the Jumna is the story of one region of a subcontinent.

Landscape II — the world that produced the conqueror

A patrimony divided among all the sons

Now cross the Hindu Kush, and the first thing to establish is that Babur came to India because the political system he was born into had no way of not breaking apart.

The Turco-Mongol tradition the Timurids inherited treated sovereignty as belonging to the ruling house collectively rather than to one man, and distributed the realm among its males as appanages — territories held with real autonomy by princes who governed, taxed and campaigned in their own right. Timur himself parcelled out provinces to sons and grandsons in exactly this way, and on his death in 1405 his designated heir was in his own appanage at Qandahar while another grandson was proclaimed at Tashkent, and the succession was settled, four years later, by war. Shah Rukh reassembled much of it from Herat and then redistributed it on the same principle to his own sons; and the process ran again, and again, until by the 1490s what remained of Timur's empire was a scatter of principalities held by cousins — Ferghana, Samarkand, Herat — whose chief occupation was attacking one another.

Babur's memoir opens on precisely this fact, without comment, in a sentence that is one of the flattest in the literature of power: *"In the month of Ramẓān of the year 899 (June 1494) and in the twelfth year of my age, I became ruler in the country of Farghāna."* He was eleven or twelve; his father, one of four sons of Abu Saʿid who had divided their father's realm between them, had just died. And the trouble came immediately and from within: his own uncles at Samarkand and Tashkent had claims on his valley, and his younger half-brother would shortly be set up against him. The system did not merely permit fratricidal war at each succession; it manufactured a set of rival principals with legitimate claims and armed followings, every generation, by rule.

Into that fragmentation came a power that had solved its own cohesion problem more recently and better: the Uzbeks under Muhammad Shaybani. Babur took Samarkand three times and lost it three times. He was decisively beaten in 1501 and had lost both Samarkand and Ferghana within three years. In 1504 he crossed the mountains with his personal following and took Kabul, which is where a landless Timurid prince ended up when Transoxiana was closed to him. He tried once more after Shaybani was killed by the Safavids at Merv in 1510, entering Samarkand in 1511 with Persian troops — and here the price is instructive, because Shah Ismaʿil's help had to be paid for in the coin of recognition, and Babur paid it, with the result that the Sunni population of the city would not have him. He was driven out again in 1512. That is a robe offered and refused, and it cost him Central Asia for good.

A double descent, and what it was worth

What he carried instead of a state was a genealogy, and he set it out carefully in his own book. On his father's side he was fifth in descent from Timur, through Miran Shah, Muhammad Mirza, Abu Saʿid and Umar Shaikh Mirza. On his mother's side, through Qutlugh Nigar Khanum, daughter of Yunus Khan, he traced a line the memoir gives link by link — Yunus Khan son of Wais Khan, and back through the khans of Moghulistan to *"Chaghatāī Khān, the second son of Chīngīz Khān."*

The dynasty this produced would spend two centuries advertising the Timurid half and quietly using the Chinggisid half, and it is worth noticing now that the label history has fastened on them — Mughal, from *Mughul*, Mongol — was not their word for themselves and was, in Hindustan, an insult. The verse in praise of Sikandar Lodi quoted earlier makes the point unintentionally: the golden age it describes is one in which *"no one knew the tribe of Mughals even by name."* Babur used *Mughul* freely in his memoirs for other people, generally with a wince.

What he had that Hindustan did not

He had two things. The first was the arithmetic of desperation: Kabul could not support him, Transoxiana was shut, and India was the only direction in which a man with a good army and no country could become a king. He had probed it five times from 1519 onward, taking Bajaur by storm, ransoming Bhira, holding on in the Punjab and losing it again.

The second was gunpowder used in a particular way. When he laid out his position in April 1526 he had seven hundred carts brought in, and the order to his gunner Ustad Ali Quli was *"that these carts should be joined together in Ottoman fashion, but using ropes of raw hide instead of chains,"* with mantelets fixed between every two carts for the matchlockmen to fire from behind. The technique was the Ottomans' — Babur's own word for it is *rumi* — and the men who ran it for him were, by name and reputation, of that world. It was a field fortification that let a small force receive a much larger one. And the force was small: the officials in charge of the boats at the Indus crossing reported that the number who came with the army, *"great and small, good and bad, retainer and non-retainer, was written down as 12,000."* Against that, Ibrahim's army was reckoned by common estimate at a hundred thousand, with about a thousand elephants between the sultan and his amirs — figures which come from Babur and should be read as a victor's reckoning of what he beat, but which are not implausible as an order of magnitude for the difference.

The seam this study will pry at

Set the two landscapes side by side and the argument of the whole study is already visible, because the two orders were failing at the same joint.

In Hindustan, the settlement's own constitution made the sultan the first among the heads of Afghan clans — a man who sat on the carpet, who could not make his nobles stand, and who held office at their pleasure. When Ibrahim tried to convert those peers into servants, they did not submit; they went and found another king. In Transoxiana, the settlement made every male of the house a sharer in sovereignty with an appanage of his own, so that the realm subdivided at each generation until nothing was left large enough to defend itself against an Uzbek confederacy that had not yet begun to subdivide. One order could not concentrate power because it had promised too much to its peers; the other could not concentrate power because it had promised too much to its kin. Both were beaten by the same failure, and the man who won at Panipat was a refugee from one of them, coming to take the other.

Beneath both lay the third thing, and it belonged to neither: a country whose people were formed by an order no ruler had built, whose intermediaries held their positions by inheritance and their revenue by force of their own retainers, and whose cultivators could disappear into the thorn in a day and a half.

That is the position, and the question it poses is the one the whole study exists to answer. A man with twelve thousand followers, no metropole, a claim by descent that means nothing to the ninety-odd per cent of his new subjects who are not Muslims and not much to the Afghans who are, has to work out how to get paid by such a country. He must assemble a hierarchy out of Central Asian Turks, Persians, Afghans, Indian Muslims and Hindu chiefs who despise one another; keep them from killing him; keep them from killing each other; get the revenue up through a layer of hereditary armed intermediaries he cannot remove; and — the thing no Muslim dynasty in India had ever managed in three hundred and twenty years — hand the whole apparatus to one heir without it coming apart. Every Delhi sultanate before him had solved the first problem for one lifetime and failed the last one every time.

The modules that follow build each part of this in turn: the floor Babur took and Humayun lost and Akbar had to take again; the settlement of rank and revenue assignment that tried to make a nobility which could not become a landed aristocracy; the robes cut for an audience that turns out to be several audiences at once; the formation the state never attempted; the cost column of the peasant who could walk away; the extraction machinery and the men who ran it; the management of information at a court that wrote its own history while it happened; and, with the sharpest attention this study has, the coordination of the elite and the question of what

anyone in that hierarchy could ever extract from the apex. What the landscape has established is the ground they stand on: three layers of a country, two failed constitutions, and no metropole behind the conqueror at all.

Reading Hindustan in 1526 against the framework

Three refinements, offered as the beginning of an argument the later modules will have to earn rather than as findings already made.

The first concerns the question this project asks of every conquered order — whether the previous conquest left a seizable coordination point a stranger can occupy and operate, or left none, so that the newcomer must forge his collaborators himself. Hindustan in 1526 shows that the question has no single answer for a country, because it has a different answer at each layer of the stack. At the top there was a seat, and it was vacated in an afternoon at Panipat, and a stranger could and did sit in it. In the middle there were thousands of seats and every one of them was occupied by a hereditary holder with his own armed men, so that the newcomer could rent them but never take them. At the bottom there was no seat at all: the jati order, the village and the Brahmin coordinated a vast population without ever pooling that coordination into any post a conqueror could enter. The question should therefore be asked layer by layer, and the answer recorded as a profile rather than a verdict — because the profile, not the top-line answer, is what predicts the shape of the order that follows. This case predicts, from the profile alone, a conquest that captures a capital instantly, spends a century bargaining with the middle, and never touches the bottom at all.

The second concerns the cost column. The framework's expectation for the ordinary subject is a ledger that comes out against revolt because a credible enforcer can reach him and he cannot leave, and it treats the specific fact that makes the order a trap as the thing to close on. Here that fact is missing, and it is missing before the conquest rather than as a consequence of it. Rain-fed agriculture, abundant land, cheap re-settlement and defensible scrub meant that flight was a live option for the north Indian cultivator, and the conqueror recorded it as such in the same breath as he recorded the country's wealth. An empty cost column at the base is not a marginal case to be noted and passed over; it changes what an apex must do, pushing extraction away from direct confrontation with the peasant and toward whoever is structurally unable to run — which is to say toward the hereditary intermediary, who is thereby made indispensable at the very moment he is made dangerous. The study will test whether the Mughal revenue system is best read as a solution to that problem.

The third is simply a fact that the colonial framing of this collection would otherwise obscure. The split between a floor operating in the conquered country and a

robe cut for a distant metropole is not a property of conquest; it is a property of conquest *funded from somewhere else*. Where the conqueror has no home treasury, the split closes, and the belief he must manage is his own army's, held on the spot, at the price of immediate and visible payment. Babur's Kabul yielded him nothing and his men could go home; the treasure of Delhi and Agra was therefore distributed within weeks rather than remitted anywhere. The variable underneath the colonial bend is not distance but *whose belief is paying for the conquest* — and this case, having only one audience and having it standing armed in the tent, is the control that shows it.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from two public-domain primary texts. Babur's own words are given in Annette Beveridge's translation of the *Bābur-nāma* (1921–22; Project Gutenberg text), including the passages on the defects and advantages of Hindustan, hereditary occupation, the thorn jungle and the mobility of villages, the revenue list and the share paid to rais and rajas, the three conquerors from beyond the passes and the unprofitability of Kabul, the Indus muster of 12,000, the order to Ustad Ali Quli for carts joined "in Ottoman fashion", the accession at Ferghana, the Chaghatai genealogy, and the speech to the begs at Agra; Beveridge's renderings are dated and her transliteration idiosyncratic, and where the memoir gives figures for enemy strength these are a victor's estimates and are treated as such. The Lodi material — Bahlul's carpet, the address *masnad-i ʿali*, the offer to stand down, the distribution of everything to the troops, the Thanesar episode with the chief of the ulama, Ibrahim's edict on rent in corn and the scarcity of coin, and the verse on Sikandar's reign — is from the *Tarikh-i Daudi* of ʿAbdullah as translated in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, vol. IV (1872). Two cautions attach to it and both are load-bearing: Elliot and Dowson's translations are abridged and were edited with a frankly stated colonial purpose, and the *Tarikh-i Daudi* is a late Afghan chronicle written well after the events it describes, so it is evidence of what was said about the Lodis rather than a contemporary record of them. The maxim commonly attributed to Ibrahim Lodi that kingship knows no kinship has not been verified in a primary text and is here reported as tradition only, not quoted.

The modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Peter Jackson on the Delhi Sultanate's political and military structure, the *bandagan*, and the *mawasat* or interspersed sub-kingdoms; Sunil Kumar on the Shamsi slaves; Irfan Habib on zamindari right, the village and the medium of revenue payment; B. D. Chattopadhyaya on the processual origin of the Rajputs, the brahma-kshatra transitional status and its disappearance from later Pratihara inscriptions; Richard Eaton on shrine-centred agrarian settlement in Bengal; Beatrice Forbes Manz on

Timurid rule and family; and W. H. Moreland and Shireen Moosvi on population. Contested figures are given as ranges: India's population around 1600 at roughly 100 million on Moreland's method and 140–150 million on Moosvi's, with the empire itself between about 60 and 100 million on the same competing bases; Firuz Shah's 180,000 royal slaves is the chronicler Afif's figure and no more than that; Ibrahim Lodi's hundred thousand men and thousand elephants are Babur's reckoning; and the date of Khanwa is given by Babur as Saturday 13 Jumada II 933, which the translator renders 17 March 1527, against 16 March in much of the secondary literature. The account of the Indo-Aryan spread and the Brahmanical synthesis follows mainstream scholarship on a subject that is politically contested in India, and is stated here only to the depth the argument requires. Every load-bearing fact is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 1

A Pillar of Heads and a Covered Way

The floor of force — a victory won in half a day and lost fourteen years later, and the fifty-year siege war that finally laid a floor; with the victory despatches set beside the private ledger of the men who issued them

Half a day

The battle the Mughal dynasty dated itself from lasted from mid-morning until early afternoon. Babur had reached the town of Panipat, some fifty miles north of Delhi, on the last day of Jumada II 932, and had spent the intervening week fortifying a position: the town and its suburbs covering his right, ditch and felled branches on his left, and across his front seven hundred bullock-carts collected from the countryside and lashed together — the order to his master gunner Ustad Ali Quli being *"that these carts should be joined together in Ottoman fashion, but using ropes of raw hide instead of chains"* — with wheeled mantelets fixed between every second pair for the matchlockmen to fire from behind, and gaps left at bowshot intervals through which a hundred or two hundred horsemen could sally. It was a field fortification borrowed wholesale from the Ottomans, whom Babur calls the *Rumis*, and it was designed to let a small force stand and receive a large one.

The force was small. At the Indus crossing the previous December the officers in charge of the boats had counted everyone who came: *"great and small, good and bad, retainer and non-retainer, was written down as 12,000."* Against that, Ibrahim Lodi's army was put by common estimate at a hundred thousand men, with about a thousand elephants between the sultan and his amirs, and in the sultan's hands, Babur notes with a professional's interest, *"the treasure of two forbears."* Babur adds the observation that decided the day before it began: Ibrahim, ruled by avarice, would not distribute that treasure to raise more men, *"could neither content his braves, nor share out his treasure."*

At first light on Friday 8 Rajab the Lodi army came on. Babur's turning parties wheeled to the flanks and shot into the rear; his wings closed; his two gunners, Ustad Ali Quli in the centre and Mustafa the commissary on the left of centre, worked their pieces; and the Afghan host, packed too densely to advance or to run, was shot to pieces where it stood. Babur's own account of the ending is flat and exact: *"When the incitement to battle had come, the Sun was spear-high; till mid-day fighting had been in full force; noon passed, the foe was crushed in defeat... In one half-day, that armed mass*

was laid upon the earth." His estimate of the dead was five or six thousand around Ibrahim and fifteen or sixteen thousand across the field, though he adds, with the scrupulousness that makes his memoir what it is, that he heard later in Agra from Hindustanis that forty or fifty thousand may have died. At the hour of the afternoon prayer a man named Tahir Tibri, who had found Ibrahim's body in a heap of the dead, brought in his head.

What Babur did next tells you what he thought he had won. That same day, before the field was cleared, he detached Humayun to ride fast and light for Agra *"to get the place into their hands and to mount guard over the treasure,"* and a second party under Mahdi Khwaja to leave its baggage, make a sudden incursion into Delhi, and keep watch on the treasuries there. He arrived opposite Delhi on 24 April, and before entering the fort he made the circuit of the tomb of Nizamuddin Auliya; the next day he visited the tomb of Qutbuddin Bakhtiyar Kaki, and the graves of Balban and Alauddin Khalji, and the tombs and gardens of Bahlul and Sikandar Lodi — the whole dead furniture of the order he had just displaced — after which he dismounted at camp, went out on a boat, and drank *araq*. He appointed a military collector and a revenue officer for the district, sealed the treasuries and handed them over. On Friday 27 April the *khutba* was read in his name in the congregational mosque of Delhi, and money was distributed to the poor.

He entered Agra on 10 May. Two days later the examination and distribution of the treasure began, and the list he sets down is the most revealing document in the founding. Humayun received seventy lakhs and a treasure-house handed over unopened and unrecorded; some commanders got ten lakhs, others eight or seven or six. Beyond that, *"Suitable money-gifts were bestowed from the Treasury on the whole army, to every tribe there was, Afghān, Hazāra, `Arab, Bīlūch etc. to each according to its position. Every trader and student, indeed every man who had come with the army, took ample portion and share."* Seventeen lakhs went to Kamran and fifteen to Muhammad Zaman Mirza, neither of whom had been at the battle; masses of gold, silver, jewels and slaves went to relations and children who were not in India at all; gifts went to kinsmen in Samarkand, Khurasan, Kashghar and Iraq, offerings to holy men there, and offerings to Mecca and Medina. And then this: *"We gave one shāhrukhi for every soul in the country of Kābul and the valley-side of Varsak, man and woman, bond and free, of age or non-age."*

Set that beside what a conquest funded from a metropole does with a captured treasury, and the difference is the whole shape of this case. Nothing was remitted. There was nowhere to remit it to. The treasure went outward in every direction at once, to the army by tribe, to the camp-followers, to the family, to the shrines, and to

every man, woman and child in the mountain principality Babur had come from — a coin a head, which is not a tax return but a payment for continued goodwill. The audience that had to believe in this conquest was standing in the camp or waiting in Kabul, and it was paid within three weeks, in cash.

It needed to be. Within weeks the enterprise very nearly dissolved. Agra was hostile and empty; *"All the inhabitants had run away in terror. Neither grain for ourselves nor corn for our horses was to be had."* The villages had taken to robbery and the roads were unsafe. The hot weather had come, and *"violent pestilential winds struck people down in heaps together; masses began to die off."* The greater part of the commanders set their faces for going home; Khwaja Kalan, who had spoken most boldly on the march out, was the loudest for departure, and had a couplet cut on the wall of his Delhi house to the effect that if he got over the Indus alive he would blacken his face before wishing for Hind again. Babur summoned a council and put the position in a sentence — *"There is no supremacy and grip on the world without means and resources; without lands and retainers sovereignty and command are impossible"* — and asked what force compelled them to abandon countries taken at such risk of life, and whether it had been for them *"to remain in Kābul, the sport of harsh poverty?"* He let the faint-hearted go, and kept the rest.

What the victory had not taken

Because the second thing Panipat established is what it had not touched. Babur's own inventory of his position that summer is a list of places that had simply carried on: *"Dilhī and Āgra excepted, not a fortified town but strengthened its defences and neither was in obedience nor submitted."* He names them — Qasim at Sambhal, Nizam Khan at Biana, Hasan Khan Mewati in Mewat, Muhammad Zaitun at Dholpur, Tatar Khan Sarang-khani at Gwalior, Husain Khan Nuhani at Rapri, Qutb Khan at Etawa, Alam Khan at Kalpi — and beyond the Ganges an entire Afghan combination that had been in rebellion against Ibrahim for years before Babur killed him, and which had already raised a padshah of its own.

This is the layered profile of the country asserting itself immediately. Panipat had emptied the top seat and captured two capitals and two treasuries. It had done nothing whatever to the layer beneath, because that layer did not sit in Delhi; it sat in several hundred walled places, each with its own hereditary holder and his own armed men, and it had to be reduced one wall at a time. Babur had won a country in half a day and now had to take it.

The plan that worked admirably

The most dangerous moment of his life in India came the following winter, and it produced the founding's first and clearest robe.

Rana Sanga of Mewar had gathered a confederacy — Rajput houses, disaffected Muslim lords including Hasan Khan of Mewat and Mahmud Lodi, brother of the dead sultan — and in February 1527 a Mughal force was beaten at Bayana. Babur's army, already homesick and depleted, began to come apart in its nerve. An astrologer named Muhammad Sharif, newly arrived from Kabul with a reinforcement of five hundred men and three camel-strings of Ghazni wine, went about the camp announcing that Mars stood in the west and whoever fought from the eastern side would be beaten. Babur records with contempt that *"Timid people who questioned the ill-augurer, became the more shattered in heart."*

What he did about it was a sequence of public acts, and he describes each of them precisely. He renounced wine — the resolution, he says, having been hidden in the treasury of his breast — and his servants smashed the gold and silver flagons and cups on the ground and distributed the fragments to the poor. A general prohibition on making, selling, buying, carrying or possessing wine went out across the dominions. He remitted the *tamgha*, the stamp and transit duty, *"throughout all the territories the tax on Musalmāns was abolished,—though its yield was more than the dreams of avarice, and though it had been established and maintained by former rulers,"* on the ground that it lay outside the Prophet's ordinances. And then he summoned the whole army, quoted verses on the certainty of death and the value of a good name, told them that God had allotted them the happiness of dying as martyrs and killing as avengers of His cause, and required each man to swear on the Quran that he would not turn his face from the enemy while life remained in him. *"All those present, beg and retainer, great and small, took the Holy Book joyfully into their hands and made vow and compact to this purport."*

And then, in his private memoir, he wrote the next sentence: *"The plan was perfect; it worked admirably for those near and afar, for seërs and hearers, for friend and foe."*

That sentence is the seam of this founding, and it should be read carefully rather than triumphantly. It is not a confession of unbelief. Babur was a Muslim of his time and place, and a man who had just given up something he loved with a self-knowledge visible throughout the memoir; the repentance may well have been sincere. What the sentence records is that he also knew exactly what the act would do, and appraised its effect on his audiences the way a commander appraises a manoeuvre — for those near and far, for those who saw and those who only heard, and for the enemy as well. The tax remission points the same way and can be measured: it was real, it was avoidable, it

cost more than the dreams of avarice, and it was granted only to Muslims. Where a man who already holds the best force in the field pays a large and unnecessary price in revenue for legitimacy, the payment names the audience whose belief he actually needed, and here the audience is written into the exemption itself. It was not the Hindustani peasant whose taxes were remitted. It was the army.

The armies met at Khanwa, near Biana, on a Saturday in March 1527. Babur's own dating, 13 Jumada II 933, his translator renders 17 March, against 16 March in much of the modern literature. The result was decisive and the killing was heavy: Hasan Khan of Mewat was shot dead by a matchlock, and the victory despatch drawn up by Babur's minister for religious affairs, Shaikh Zain of Khwaf, lists the fallen chiefs one after another with their contingents, consigning each to hell in the elaborate Persian of the genre, and closes on a verse about hills of Hindu bodies with a fountain of blood running from each. After the victory, *"Ghāzī (Victor in a Holy-war) was written amongst the royal titles,"* and under the calligraphic heading of the despatch Babur wrote a quatrain of his own, ending: *"Thanks be to God! a ghāzī I became."*

Now set that document beside the order of battle it describes. The same despatch, listing the commanders of the victorious army, includes among them *"the amīrs of Hind"* — the Khan-of-Khans Dilawar Khan, Malik Dad Kararani, and others — Indian Muslim lords fighting in a holy war against Hindus; and on the other side, among the confederacy of infidels, stood Hasan Khan Mewati and Mahmud Lodi, Muslims both, whose deaths the despatch celebrates in Quranic language. The war was fought between two coalitions each containing Muslims and Hindus, and it was described in a document that admitted only one axis. That is not hypocrisy discovered by a modern reader; it is a register selected for an audience, and Babur has told us in his own hand that he selected it and that it worked admirably.

The pillar

The floor's other instrument appears the following winter, and it is worth setting down exactly because it is the thing the founding narratives are least anxious to dwell on and the thing that actually reduced forts.

In January 1528 Babur besieged Chanderi, held for Rana Sanga's cause by Medini Rao. The one practicable line of attack was a walled passage running down the hillside to water; the assault carried it, and the defenders abandoned the walls with what looked like sudden panic. Babur reconstructs what had in fact happened: *"they had taken the resolve of those who give up a place as lost; they put all their ladies and beauties to death, then, looking themselves to die, came naked out to fight."* Two or three hundred of them retired into Medini Rao's house and *"there almost all killed one another in this way:—*

one having taken stand with a sword, the rest eagerly stretched out the neck for his blow." The fort fell, Babur notes, in an hour, *"without drum and standard, with no hard fighting done."*

And then: *"A pillar of pagan-heads was ordered set up on a hill north-west of Chandīrī."*

A chronogram was found for the victory in the words *Fath-i daru'l-harb*, the conquest of a hostile seat, and Babur worked it into a quatrain. But the pillar is not decoration and not merely cruelty; it is a communication addressed to the next garrison down the road, and it is the cheapest siege engine an army can deploy. In a country of several hundred walled places held by men who could not be replaced, the alternative to storming each in turn is persuading most of them to open the gate, and terror priced at one hill of heads is the instrument for that. It belongs in the account of the floor for exactly the reason the founding legends leave it out.

Babur beat the eastern Afghans and the Bengal forces at the Ghaghra in May 1529 and died at Agra in December 1530, four and a half years after Panipat, having spent almost all of them fighting.

The floor that was not there

Then the whole thing came apart, and the manner of its coming apart is the strongest evidence in this study for a claim the framework makes and this case might have been expected to test: that structural change comes from inside the hierarchy rather than from the ruled.

Humayun inherited a claim, not a state. Within a decade he faced a rival who understood Hindustan far better than any Timurid did — Farid Khan, an Afghan of Bihar who had risen through exactly the layer of hereditary landholders and revenue farmers the Mughals had not touched, and who took the title Sher Shah. At Chausa, ten miles south-west of Buxar, on 26 June 1539, Sher Shah destroyed a Mughal army that had been allowed to sit through a monsoon on the wrong side of a river; Humayun escaped across the Ganges. At Kannauj, near Bilgram, on 17 May 1540, he destroyed a second and larger one. Humayun lost Delhi and Agra, then the Punjab, then everything, and spent some fifteen years as a wanderer in Sind, Rajasthan and Persia, where Shah Tahmasp's assistance was bought at a price that included Qandahar and public professions of Shi'ism.

Nothing about this was a popular rising. It was one member of the Indian military class replacing another, using the same technologies and a better grasp of the country; and the Sur regime that followed was, by the common judgement of the sources and the modern literature alike, the most competent administration north India had seen

— a silver *rupiya* of standard weight, a rebuilt trunk road with staging houses and wells, a revenue survey based on measurement and standard crop rates that the Mughals would later take over almost entire. The Mughal floor was not defeated by the people it taxed. It was defeated by a rival warlord with a better filing system.

Sher Shah died at Kalinjar in May 1545 — killed, characteristically, at a siege. His house fell into the succession disease that had killed every Delhi dynasty before it, and Humayun came back through the gap, beating a Sur army at Sirhind in 1555 and recovering Delhi. In January 1556 he died of a fall on the stairs of his library, having held his capital for about six months.

His son Akbar was thirteen. He was enthroned at Kalanaur in the Punjab in February 1556, and by October the Mughal governor of Delhi had been beaten out of the city by Hemu — a Hindu, born at Rewari, who had risen to be the chief minister and army commander of the Sur successor Adil Shah, who had won a long series of engagements on his master's behalf, and who now had himself crowned at the Purana Qila under the title Vikramaditya. Most of the Mughal generals advised retreat to Kabul. Bairam Khan overruled them, and on 5 November 1556 the two armies met on the same ground as thirty years before. Hemu's artillery train had already been captured on the march by a Mughal detachment that found it weakly guarded. In the battle he was hit in the face by an arrow and fell unconscious; his army, seeing him go down, broke. He was brought in and killed, his head sent to Kabul and his body exposed at Delhi.

Thirty years and six months after the first Panipat, the Mughals held Kabul, Qandahar, part of the Punjab and the neighbourhood of Delhi, and had just narrowly avoided being extinguished by a Hindu chief minister at the head of an Afghan army. Whatever was founded in 1526, it was not yet a floor.

The covered way

The floor was laid between roughly 1561 and 1576, and it was laid by siege.

The campaigns run in a sequence that looks miscellaneous and is not: Malwa in 1561, Gondwana in 1564 (where the regent Rani Durgavati fought and was killed), Chittor from October 1567 to February 1568, Ranthambhore in 1569, Kalinjar in 1569, Gujarat in 1572–73, Bengal and Bihar from 1574, Mewar's field army broken at Haldighati in 1576. What almost every one of these has in common is that the decisive operation was the reduction of a fortified place. That is not an accident of Akbar's temperament. It follows directly from what the country was. The cultivator could not be pinned — his crops were rain-grown, his village could be re-founded in a day and a half, and thorn jungle stood within a walk of most of the Doab — so there was no

point building a floor against him. What could be pinned was the hereditary intermediary, because his refuge was made of stone and could not be moved; and he was also the man who actually delivered the revenue. A floor in Hindustan therefore meant a siege train.

Chittor is the exemplary case and Akbar treated it as such. The fort stands on a long plateau above the plain, with a circuit the victory despatch puts at three *farsangs* and battlements it calls impossible to count. Rana Udai Singh withdrew into the hills, leaving the place to Jaimal Rathore, Patta and others with a garrison the despatch numbers at some five thousand chosen Rajputs, ten thousand men stationed for defence, and a thousand of the Rana's own troops. Akbar arrived on 20 or 23 October 1567 and settled down to engineering. Mines were driven under the walls and blown. Heavy cannon were brought up from the capital and more were cast at the encampment. And a *sabat* was built — a covered way, roofed and walled, pushed forward across open ground under fire until it reached the foot of the defences, so that men and guns could be brought to the wall without being shot off it. The despatch says plainly why: the garrison was well supplied with mortars, cannon, matchlocks, catapults and powder, and the emperor did not intend to spend his army's lives storming into that.

On 22 February 1568 the walls were breached in several places at once. Jaimal came to the breach to direct repairs and was shot in the forehead; the despatch claims the shot for Akbar personally, with his matchlock ready in his hands. The garrison's collapse followed; the women of the fort performed *jauhar*; the surviving men came out to die. And then, the fort taken, Akbar ordered the killing of the population.

The number usually given is thirty thousand. It rests on Mughal chronicle authority and cannot be independently checked, and the various figures in circulation — for the garrison, for the non-combatants inside, for the dead — differ widely enough that the honest statement is a range: a garrison in the thousands, a civil population inside the walls that the sources put anywhere from twenty to forty thousand, and a slaughter of non-combatants that every account including the empire's own affirms, ordered by the emperor after resistance had ended. Abu'l Fazl, writing the official history thirty years later, supplies the justification, and its existence is more interesting than its adequacy: when Alauddin Khalji took Chittor in 1303 he had spared the peasants because they had not fought, whereas at Chittor in 1568 the peasantry had fought beside the garrison with great zeal, and had thereby put themselves outside the protection non-combatants enjoyed. A rule was understood to exist. The chronicle's work is to show that the rule had been complied with.

Akbar spent three days at Chittor, had the gates and the great drums carried off to be set up elsewhere, and rode for Ajmer, where he prayed at the tomb of Muinuddin Chishti.

The despatch and the policy

At Ajmer, on 10 Ramadan 975 — 9 March 1568 — the victory proclamation was issued in his name.

The *Fathnama-i Chittor* is a formal document of a recognised type, composed by an unnamed secretary, and the first thing to say about it is that it is a copy. It follows, in structure and in its opening moves, the despatch Shaikh Zain had written for Babur after Khanwa forty-one years before, which itself opens with the words of the Prophet's sermon on the conquest of Mecca. Praise of God, praise of the Prophet, praise of the king, the reason for the assault, the course of the fighting, a closing request for the subjects' prayers: the shape is fixed, and the contents are assembled from the Quran, from Sa'di and Nizami, and from the standing furniture of Persian epic. Within that frame the document declares that the emperor is engaged in jihad, that he subdues the forts of the infidels and raises the banners of Islam over them, and that his purpose is to erase the marks of idolatry from India.

The grievance it states, however, is not religious at all. Rana Udai Singh had failed to come and pay his respects at court, or at the very least to send his son with tribute, and had instead retired to his hereditary stronghold and begun collecting supplies. The offence is non-attendance. The answer is holy war.

And the list of people the document is addressed to, set out in its closing paragraphs, is the most useful single line in the module. It names the khans, the sultans, the sayyids, the great ulama, the shaikhs and the qazis — and then it names the *chaudhris* and the *qanungos*, the hereditary landholders and the registrars of local revenue custom, together with lords, peasants and commoners of the Punjab, and instructs them all to rejoice in the news and to pray for the king. That is the distribution list of the robe, written down by the people who cut it. The audiences whose belief the empire was managing in 1568 were its own Muslim service class and the hereditary rural intermediaries through whose hands the revenue passed — precisely the two groups that could withhold something the empire needed.

Now put the despatch beside the emperor's own acts on either side of it. In 1562 Akbar had married the daughter of Raja Bharmal of Amber and prohibited the enslavement of prisoners of war. In 1563 he had abolished the tax on Hindu pilgrims; in 1564, the *jizya*, the poll tax that had marked non-Muslim status under every Muslim dynasty in India for three and a half centuries. In 1568 he sacked Chittor and issued a

proclamation announcing a war to erase idolatry, having first gone to pray at a Sufi shrine. In 1569 Rao Surjan Hada surrendered Ranthambhore on terms and entered imperial service with his house intact. By 1576 the imperial army sent against Rana Pratap of Mewar was commanded by Raja Man Singh of Amber, a Rajput, whose grandfather's family had been bound to the dynasty by the marriage of 1562. And in his later years Akbar would be represented in Rajput bardic poetry as a figure assimilable to Ram.

Lay the arithmetic out and leave the sum. A man does not abolish the *jizya* in 1564 as a device to make a jihad proclamation more effective in 1568. What the sequence shows is a ruler with a settled policy of binding Hindu chiefs into his service by marriage, rank and confirmed possession, who nonetheless reached for the vocabulary of holy war at the one moment when four months of casualties in front of a wall had to be made to mean something to the men who had taken them, and when the news had to travel down to every *chaudhri* in the Punjab in a form that would be understood as final. The despatch is a register, chosen for an audience and a moment, in a genre with fixed conventions, drafted by a secretary from a template. Read as evidence of what the empire intended toward its Hindu subjects it is misleading in both directions. Read as evidence of whose belief the empire thought it had to hold, it is exact.

The army, and the branded horse

The force that did this work was not a national army and was not, in any simple sense, a Mughal one. Its command was drawn from Central Asian Turks who had come with Babur or after him, from Persians drawn by the wealth of the court, from Afghans absorbed after the Sur collapse, from Indian Muslims, and — increasingly and deliberately after 1562 — from Rajputs and other Indian chiefs who kept their homelands and served with their own clansmen. Its core was heavy cavalry supplied by rank-holders in contingents; its cutting edge in siege was artillery, some of it cast on the spot for a particular wall, and matchlockmen; its transport and shock element included elephants; and its pay came overwhelmingly not in coin but by assignment of the revenue of a tract, which is the subject of the settlement and belongs in the next module.

But one device belongs here, because it is what converted a paper army into a floor. In his eighteenth regnal year, 1573–74, Akbar imposed the *dagh* and the *chehra* — the branding of every horse on a rank-holder's establishment with a mark identifying the noble it belonged to, and the keeping of a written physical description of every trooper — with periodic musters at which the contingent had to be produced and salary clawed back where it was short. Neither was new; both were revived from the practice of

Alauddin Khalji two and a half centuries earlier, which is worth noticing, because it means the Mughal floor was partly rebuilt out of instruments recovered from the order Babur had displaced, exactly as the revenue system would be rebuilt out of Sher Shah's.

What the branding fixed was the oldest fraud in the business: nobles borrowing each other's men and horses on inspection day, so that the emperor paid for a hundred troopers and got fifty. The floor of force in a country of this size was not, in the end, a number of soldiers. It was an accounting relationship between the apex and several hundred men who each held an armed following, and it was as real as the audit.

Who could not leave

The module closes where the landscape left it. The framework's standing question about a floor is what makes the order a trap rather than a contract — what prevents the subject from simply going. In Hindustan the answer for the ordinary cultivator was that nothing did. He was not fenced, not tied to a canal, not registered, and his agriculture and the abundance of land meant that flight and re-settlement cost him a season at worst. The Mughal floor was never built to hold him, and the empire's revenue documents would spend the next century and a half registering the consequences.

What the floor was built to hold were the two layers that could not move. The zamindar could not carry his fort into the jungle, and once the fort had been mined, breached and garrisoned, his choice was service or destruction — which is why the empire's map is best read not as a coloured area but as a network of reduced strongholds and the roads between them, with the country in between held by arrangement with men who had been shown what the alternative looked like. And the rank-holder could not carry his assignment anywhere either, because it existed only in a register the emperor kept.

That is the floor: an afternoon at Panipat that founded a dynasty and settled nothing, a fourteen-year interval in which a better administrator took the whole thing away, and then fifty years of engineering against walls.

Reading the Mughal floor against the framework

Two refinements, both building on what the ground established rather than announcing anything new.

The first concerns what a floor is made of when the base population cannot be pinned. The framework's Module 1 expects a founding conquest to be an event, and expects the mechanics of capturability — geography, fortresses, weapons monopoly —

to explain why the governed could not disperse. Here the governed *could* disperse, and did, and the conqueror said so before he had ruled a season. The consequence is that the founding is not an event but a fifty-year siege campaign, and that its decisive technology is not the battle-winning one. Babur's cart-wall and field artillery won three pitched battles and produced a capital, a treasury and a dynasty, and were entirely insufficient to produce a floor; his grandson's floor was produced by mines, cast guns and a covered way pushed across open ground under fire. **Where the base can run and the middle cannot, the floor is not built against the population at all — it is built against the fortified places of the intermediary layer, and the diagnostic instrument is the siege train rather than the field army.** The corollary is that such a conquest's real chronology is the list of forts, not the list of battles, and a study that dates the order from its famous victory will misread the whole first half-century.

The second concerns how to read a founding legend, and it is a discipline rather than a finding. The framework instructs the researcher to set the founding narrative beside the violence it obscures. This case adds a prior step: **establish the genre before reading the claim.** The *Fathnama-i Chittor* is not a statement of Akbar's beliefs or intentions; it is an instance of a document type, composed by an anonymous secretary to fixed conventions, modelled closely on a despatch written for Babur forty-one years earlier, and assembled largely from Quranic citations and Persian verse. Its religious thunder is a property of the form. To read it as revealing the mind of the emperor who abolished the *jizya* four years before issuing it is to mistake a template for a testimony. What such a document does reliably reveal is two other things: the audiences named in its own distribution list, which here are the Muslim service elite and the hereditary rural intermediaries; and, where the ruler's private words survive beside it, the distance between the act and the appraisal. Babur supplies both halves of that comparison himself — the oath sworn on the Quran, the wine smashed, the transit duty remitted at a cost beyond the dreams of avarice, and then, in his own memoir, the verdict that *"The plan was perfect; it worked admirably."* That is not proof of cynicism, and this study does not claim it as proof of cynicism. It is proof that the man performing the act was simultaneously keeping the ledger, which is all the framework ever claims about the men at the top of an order, and it is rare to find both entries in the same hand.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Babur are from Annette Beveridge's public-domain translation of the *Bābur-nāma* (1921–22): the order to Ustad Ali Quli for carts joined in Ottoman fashion; the Indus muster written down as 12,000; Ibrahim's inability to content his braves or share out his treasure; the sun spear-high and the half-day in which the armed mass was laid upon the earth; the detachments sent the same day to guard the treasuries; the roll of the distribution at Agra including

the *shahrukhi* for every soul in Kabul, man and woman, bond and free; the inhabitants fled and the pestilential winds; the list of fortified towns in no obedience; the speech to the begs; the astrologer's Mars in the west; the wine renunciation and the remission of the *tamgha* on Musalmans; the oath on the Holy Book and the verdict that the plan worked admirably; the assumption of the title *ghazi* and the quatrain beneath the despatch; the resolve of those who give up a place as lost, and the pillar of pagan-heads ordered set up at Chanderi. Two dating cautions attach. Beveridge renders 8 Rajab 932 as 20 April 1526, where the conventional date for the first battle of Panipat is 21 April; and she renders 13 Jumada II 933 as 17 March 1527 for Khanwa, where much of the modern literature gives 16 March. The Khanwa victory despatch quoted here is Shaikh Zain of Khwaf's, preserved within the memoir; its florid abuse of the defeated is the genre's, not Babur's own prose. Babur's casualty figures for Panipat are his own estimates with a much larger Hindustani report appended by him, and are given here as he gives them.

The *Fathnama-i Chittor* is summarised and paraphrased rather than quoted, from Taymiya R. Zaman's annotated modern translation of the text edited by Ishtiyaq Ahmad Zilli in *The Mughal State and Culture 1556–1598: Selected Letters and Documents from Munshaat-i-Namakin*; the observations that it follows Shaikh Zain's Khanwa despatch in structure, that the stated grievance is Udai Singh's failure to attend or send tribute, and that its addressees include *chaudhris* and *qanungos* alongside the khans and ulama, all derive from that translation and its apparatus, and the copyright in the English wording is Zaman's. Abu'l Fazl's *Akbarnama* is used at second hand for the comparison with Alauddin Khalji's treatment of the Chittor peasantry in 1303.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Peter Jackson and Sunil Kumar on the Sultanate's military class; Irfan Habib and M. Athar Ali on the *mansab*, the *dagh* and the *chehra*, whose introduction in the eighteenth regnal year (1573–74) is attested by the *Iqbalnama* and accepted by both, though the earlier history of the two numerical ranks remains disputed; John F. Richards and Jos Gommans on Mughal warfare and the shape of the conquest; A. Azfar Moin on sacred kingship. Contested figures are given as ranges rather than resolved. The dead at Panipat are between the fifteen or sixteen thousand Babur estimated and the forty or fifty thousand he later heard reported. The Chittor garrison figures are the victory despatch's own and are a victor's document; the civil population inside the walls is variously put between twenty and forty thousand; and the figure of thirty thousand killed in the massacre rests on Mughal chronicle authority, is repeated throughout the secondary literature, and cannot be independently verified — what is not in dispute in any source, imperial or Rajput, is that non-combatants were killed in large numbers on the emperor's order

after the fighting had ended. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 2

Proprietor of Every Acre

The settlement — who got what and on what terms: a nobility paid in revocable paper, a rural gentry whose right could be bought and sold, and one hereditary exception deliberately carved out

The claim

François Bernier, a French physician who spent some eight years in India in the middle of the seventeenth century, attached to the household of one of Aurangzeb's leading nobles and with the run of the imperial camp, set down the Mughal settlement in a single sentence that Europe then believed for three hundred years:

"It should also be borne in mind, that the Great Mogol constitutes himself heir of all the Omrahs, or lords, and likewise of the Mansebdars, or inferior lords, who are in his pay; and, what is of the utmost importance, that he is proprietor of every acre of land in the kingdom, excepting, perhaps, some houses and gardens which he sometimes permits his subjects to buy, sell, and otherwise dispose of, among themselves."

He explained the mechanism as clearly as any modern textbook: *"the King, as proprietor of the land, makes over a certain quantity to military men, as an equivalent for their pay; and this grant is called jah-ghir... the word jah-ghir signifying the spot from which to draw, or the place of salary."* What was not so granted the King kept as the domains of his house, farmed by contractors bound to pay him an annual rent.

And he drew the political conclusion, in a passage explaining why every noble at court had abandoned Shah Jahan for his son during the war of succession: *"the Omrahs of Hindoustan cannot be proprietors of land, or enjoy an independent revenue, like the nobility of France and the other states of Christendom. Their income, as I said before, consists exclusively of pensions which the King grants or takes away according to his own will or pleasure. When deprived of this pension, they sink at once into utter insignificance, and find it impossible even to borrow the smallest sum."*

Bernier was not a fool and was not inventing. His letters became the foundation of the European theory of Oriental despotism, passed to Montesquieu, and through him eventually to Marx's Asiatic mode of production and the twentieth-century literature on hydraulic empires — a lineage of enormous consequence resting on the testimony of one observant Frenchman about a country whose revenue records he never saw. The

work of this module is to set his claim beside the empire's own paperwork, and the result is that he was substantially right about one layer of Indian society and substantially wrong about another, in a way that turns out to be the most important single fact about the Mughal settlement.

The rank

What the emperor granted a servant was not land. It was a number.

By the eighteenth year of Akbar's reign, 1573–74, every man in imperial service held a *mansab* expressed in two figures. The first, *zat*, fixed his personal pay and his place in the hierarchy. The second, *sawar*, fixed the number of horsemen he was obliged to maintain and the sum sanctioned to cover their pay. Both numbers were converted into money and obligation by schedules of rates, the *dastur al-amals*, which the administration could revise. A man was his two numbers, and Abu'l Fazl's official register of the grandees does exactly that: it lists them by name and rank in descending order from ten thousand to two hundred, and gives almost nothing else, on the stated ground that it does not become the praiser of the king to praise anybody else.

Around this the empire built an audit. The *Ain-i-Akbari* is candid about why. Before the reforms, *"Low, avaricious men sold their horses, and were content to serve as foot-soldiers, or brought instead of a superior horse, a tattu that looked more like an ass."* Descriptive rolls were introduced and pay made dependent on inspection against them, and this helped, but branding was not imposed at first because the emperor had listened to advisers who thought it cruel to the animals, whereupon, in the Ain's flat summary, *"Horse borrowing was then the order of the day."* So the brand came in, and it worked precisely as an anti-fraud device: *"His Majesty's chief object is to prevent the soldiers from borrowing horses (for the time of musters) or exchanging them for worse ones."* Troopers whose horses carried the imperial brand were preferred over those whose did not. The Ain, having explained all this, closes the section with a sentence that captures the whole administrative temperament of the reign: branding a horse may indeed inflict pain, *"but when viewed from a higher point, it is the cause of much satisfaction to the thinking man."*

The service class this produced was small and grew. Around 1595 the empire carried something like 1,803 rank-holders; by 1637 about 3,243; by 1690, after the Deccan expansion, some 14,499. And it was extraordinarily top-heavy. Working from the Ain's own figures, A. Jan Qaisar and Shireen Moosvi calculate that 1,671 rank-holders absorbed roughly eighty-two per cent of the empire's assessed revenue resources; that the top twelve men alone took over eighteen per cent of the total income of the empire; and that the 1,149 at the bottom of that same list shared about thirty per cent between

them. Half a century later the pattern held: in the twentieth year of Shah Jahan's reign the 445 highest-ranking men, some five or six per cent of the total, claimed just under sixty-two per cent of the estimated revenue as salary for themselves and their troopers.

Those figures should be read with care, since they describe salary claims on paper rather than cash in hand, and the gap between the assessed *jama* and the realised *hasil* is a subject the extraction module will have to take up. But the order of magnitude is not in doubt. A few hundred men held claims on most of the wealth of northern India.

What the rank was not

They did not own it, and could not keep it.

A *jagir* was an assignment of the assessed revenue of a specified tract, calculated to equal the holder's salary entitlement, and held for as long as the emperor chose. It conveyed no judicial or administrative authority over the tract and no property in its soil. It was routinely transferred — Blochmann's note in the Ain records that after Akbar's time jagirs *"were frequently changed"* — and the transfer was the point: a man moved every few years could not build a following, marry into the local gentry, or turn an assignment into a country. A rank-holder was as a rule not posted to a jagir in his own homeland at all.

There was no entail, no primogeniture, and no legal nobility whatever. Rank was not inherited; it was awarded, and it lapsed at death. And the estate lapsed with it, which is the half of Bernier's claim that stands up. On a noble's death the imperial establishment took his property to settle his accounts with the crown — the loans against future salary, the advances, the shortfalls found at muster — and what remained, if anything, went to the heirs at the emperor's pleasure. In practice a great man's son could expect to be given a rank of his own; the second-generation servant, the *khanazad* or son of the house, had a real advantage in the competition for promotion, so that status was in some measure hereditary in fact even though nothing was hereditary in law. But status is not an asset. Nothing passed down that could be used against the throne.

Read against the landscape, the design is legible as a treatment for a specific disease. The Timurid system Babur was born into had made every male of the house a sharer in sovereignty with an appanage of his own, and had subdivided itself into irrelevance in four generations. The Lodi system had made the sultan first among the heads of Afghan clans who held the country in *iqta*, and had ended with those clans fetching a foreign king to replace him. The Mughal answer to both was to convert the shareholder into a salaried officer whose entire worth was an entry in a register the emperor kept — and Bernier, watching the war of succession, saw the consequence with perfect clarity.

Men whose income is a pension do not fight for the pensioner who is losing. They transfer to the one who will be issuing the pensions next.

An aristocracy of strangers

The other half of the design is who was let in.

The nobility of the mature empire was assembled from mutually antagonistic pools: Turanis from Central Asia, the oldest and most dangerous element, whose kinsmen had rebelled against Akbar in the 1560s; Iranis drawn from Safavid territory by the wealth of the court; Afghans, the group the dynasty had twice been beaten by and was accordingly slow to trust; Indian Muslims of various descents; Rajputs from the 1560s; and in due course Marathas and Deccanis. Hindus were a consistent and substantial minority of the whole across three reigns — a little over a fifth of the rank-holders under Akbar, essentially the same proportion under Shah Jahan, and only slightly lower in the first half of Aurangzeb's reign. Blochmann's count from the Ain's own lists gives thirty-two Hindus among 252 rank-holders between five thousand and five hundred, and twenty-five among 163 between four hundred and two hundred.

This is the answer, or the beginning of one, to the question the whole study runs on: how a man gets Turks, Persians, Afghans, Indian Muslims and Rajput chiefs to work in one hierarchy without killing him or each other. He does it by making sure that no one of them can combine with the others, that each has more to fear from its rivals' advancement than from the emperor's demands, and that the only currency any of them can accumulate is a rank that only he can issue. The heterogeneity is not tolerance; it is a load-bearing structural feature. An elite of one ethnicity coordinates. An elite of five competes for the emperor's favour.

The insider's complaint about how it actually worked survives in Badauni, who loathed most of what Akbar did and is therefore useful. Writing of the state of things before the reform of the musters: *"The whole country, with the exception of the Khalisa lands (domains), was held by the Amirs as jagir; and as they were wicked and rebellious, and spent large sums on their stores and workshops, and amassed wealth, they had no leisure to look after the troops or take an interest in the people. In cases of emergency, they came themselves with some of their slaves and Moghul attendants to the scene of the war; but really useful soldiers there were none."* That is the settlement's chronic failure mode stated by a hostile contemporary: revenue assigned in exchange for soldiers, and consumed instead. The brand and the descriptive roll exist because of it.

The exception, deliberately made

And then, having built a system whose entire principle was that nothing could be inherited, the empire carved out one hereditary exception and put its most formidable subjects inside it.

A Rajput chief who submitted entered the same hierarchy as everyone else and took a *mansab* like everyone else, with a *sawar* obligation and a contingent to produce at muster. What he also received was his ancestral country back, as *watan jagir* — his homeland, held hereditarily, guaranteed against transfer, and passing to his successor. Where every other rank-holder was rotated deliberately so that he could not put down roots, the Rajput was rooted on purpose. The Sisodias of Mewar, who resisted longest and were beaten hardest, were in the end given the same terms.

The accounting of it is worth noticing, because it shows the empire conceding the substance while retaining the vocabulary. As Irfan Habib reads the Rajasthan material, the revenue of a chief's *watan* was set against his salary claim as a rank-holder, not added to it: the chief was paid, in large part, out of his own country, and the assignment was framed as remuneration for military service rather than as recognition of an inherent hereditary right. The empire held, on paper, that the *watan* was a jagir like any other, which happened never to be moved. Everybody involved knew what it actually was.

That carve-out is the single most intelligent thing in the Mughal settlement, and it is also a confession. The whole architecture exists to prevent capacity from hardening into claim; and at the one point where the claim was already hard — a clan with a formed identity, a genealogy, a fortress and a country, whose defeat had cost four months of casualties at Chittor and would cost more at Ranthambhore and in the Aravallis — the empire stopped, gave the man the thing it denied everyone else, and bought his service on top of it. It preferred a hereditary Rajput in Amber who owed it an army to a rotating Turani in Amber who owed it nothing but who would have had to conquer the place first, repeatedly.

The layer that was registered rather than replaced

Beneath the rank-holders lay the class the empire never seriously attempted to displace, and the *Ain-i-Akbari* records it with a candour that is easy to read past.

The provincial sections of the Ain go tract by tract and note, along with the revenue and the crops and the notable temples, who the local *zamindar* is, what caste or tribe he belongs to, and how many horse and foot he commands. Between Surat and Nandurbar the hilly tract of Baglana is under a Rathor *"commanding 3,000 cavalry*

and 10,000 infantry." A tract between two *sarkars* is inhabited by the Gohel Rajputs, managed at present by a Brahman named Tewari, the titular raja being of no account, with three thousand horse and seven thousand foot. Near Basim there is an indigenous people *"for the most part proud and refractory called Hatkars,"* with a thousand horse and five thousand foot. Banjara is another zamindari, with a hundred horse and a thousand foot, *"At the present time it is under the authority of a woman."* A Gond chief has a thousand horse and forty thousand foot, and a diamond mine, which he took from someone else not long ago.

Consider what kind of document that is. It is not a census of subjects. It is an order of battle, compiled by the empire, of the people standing between the emperor and the crop, with their strength written down beside their names. The imperial administration knew exactly what it would face in every district if it pushed too hard, and it wrote the figure in the manual.

What it did not do was abolish them. Zamindari right under the Mughals was hereditary as a matter of course, divisible among heirs, and — the fact that finishes Bernier's second claim — freely bought and sold, with examples running from Akbar's reign onward and no bar of caste or religion on the transaction. It could be mortgaged and gifted. It was litigated over. It was not ownership of land in the sense a French *seigneur* would have recognised, and Habib is careful about this: it was a claim on the produce of the soil, subordinate to and coexisting with the state's revenue demand, and beneath it sat the cultivator's own occupancy right, which was itself heritable and in many places transferable. The Mughal countryside was a nest of layered claims, not a blank sheet over which an oriental despot's will ran unobstructed.

So the sentence that founded a European theory of Asia is a legal fiction in the strict sense — a proposition maintained because it is useful, and false. And it is a fiction of a specific and instructive kind: true of what its author could see and false of what he could not. Bernier lived at the apex, among *omrahs* whose income was indeed a revocable pension and whose property the emperor did indeed take at death, and he generalised the apex's description of itself to a country whose district paperwork he never opened. The theory of Oriental despotism is, in its origin, the Mughal court's account of the Mughal court, exported.

The small grants

One further category belongs in the ledger because of what it reveals rather than what it cost. Alongside the assignments to soldiers, the empire made grants of revenue-free land and cash allowances — *madad-i-ma'ash*, sometimes *milk*, with cash stipends called *wazifa* — administered by an officer called the *sadr*.

The Ain names the four classes of recipient: those who have withdrawn from worldly occupation to search after knowledge; those who practise self-denial and have renounced the society of men; *"such as are weak and poor, and have no strength for inquiry"*; and, fourth, *"honourable men of gentle birth who from want of knowledge are unable to provide for themselves by taking up a trade."* Abu'l Fazl adds that crores were given away in this manner and the grants were increasing daily.

The categories are worth reading twice. Three of them describe scholarship and piety and indigence; the fourth is a pension for the déclassé — men of good family with no skill and no capacity, maintained because their fall would be visible. And nothing in the wording is confessional. It is a description of a clientele, not of a faith. These grants were also resumable, and were resumed: the Ain's own apparatus records an earlier *sadr*, Shaikh Gadai, cancelling *madad-i-ma'ash* holdings wholesale. Even charity was held at pleasure.

What was heritable, and where

Set the three settlements beside one another and the pattern is exact.

At the top, the service nobility: no heritable asset at all, rank awarded and lapsing, revenue assigned and rotated, estate taken at death, and a soft advantage for a great man's son that conveyed no property.

In the middle, on one specific frontier, the chiefs of the Rajput houses: heritable homeland, guaranteed, not rotated, in addition to a rank on the same terms as everyone else.

Below that, across the whole countryside, the zamindar: heritable, divisible, saleable, mortgageable, and registered by the empire together with the number of horse and foot he could raise.

The variable that sorts them is not loyalty, not religion, not rank, and not antiquity of service. It is whether the emperor could get another one. A Turani commander could be replaced from Central Asia, an Irani from Isfahan, an accountant from the Khatri and Kayastha families of the plains, and if none of these served, from the enormous market in military labour that the whole Persianate world constituted; so the terms offered to such men were as thin as the market allowed. A Kachhwaha of Amber could not be replaced, because what made him valuable was precisely the thing that could not be transferred — a formed clan that would follow him and no one else, in a country his family had held for centuries; so he got the one thing nobody else got. And the ordinary zamindar could not be replaced either, but neither did he need to be, because he was already doing the work: he collected from a peasantry that could otherwise walk into the thorn, and no imperial officer on a three-year posting was going

to do that better. So the empire registered his right, taxed through it, and noted his strength in the margin.

The settlement, in other words, is priced. And the price is set by substitutability.

Reading the Mughal settlement against the framework

The refinement this module contributes builds directly on the two before it, and it is a single proposition: **the form of a grant tracks the replaceability of the holder.**

The framework's Module 2 asks who got what — the shares, the ranks, the durable positions, the terms on which capacity is licensed. This case shows that the interesting variable is not the size of the share but its *tenure*, and that tenure is set by the apex's estimate of the market. Where a substitute can be bought, the grant is revocable, rotated, and reclaimed at death, and the holder is made structurally incapable of accumulating anything usable against the throne. Where no substitute exists, the apex concedes exactly what it forbids everywhere else, and does so knowingly, with a vocabulary that preserves the fiction — the *watan jagir* is called a jagir and treated as salary, and is never moved. Where the holder is both irreplaceable and already performing the function, the apex does not grant at all: it registers what is already there, and writes down how many men it would face if it tried.

Two corollaries follow.

The first is a research discipline. **A settlement should be read for its exceptions before its rules**, because the rule states the apex's preference and the exception states the apex's limit. Reading the Mughal system from the *mansab* alone gives an absolutist machine of enormous elegance in which nothing is inherited; reading it from the *watan jagir* gives the true map of where that machine stopped. The exceptions are the empire's own estimate of what it could not do, recorded by the people best placed to know, and they are more informative than the whole of the regular apparatus.

The second concerns the fiction, and connects to what Module 1 established about reading founding documents by genre. Bernier's "proprietor of every acre" is a fiction that survived for three centuries and shaped how Europe theorised Asia — and the reason it survived is that it was accurate about the only layer its author was in a position to observe. **The reliability of an outside observer's account of a settlement is bounded by the layer he lived in**, and where his testimony describes the apex's self-understanding rather than the district records, it should be treated as evidence about the apex rather than about the country. The check, here as elsewhere, is the paperwork the order kept for its own use rather than the account it gave of itself: the branding regulations, the salary schedules, the pargana tables with their columns of horse and

foot, and the deeds by which one zamindar sold his right to another in a kingdom where, on the theory, there was nothing to sell.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Bernier are from the public-domain Constable revision of Irving Brock's translation of *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668* (1891): the passage on the Great Mogol constituting himself heir of the Omrahs and Mansebdars and being proprietor of every acre; the explanation of the *jahghir* as the place of salary; and the passage on the Omrahs' inability to own land or borrow money once deprived of their pensions. Bernier's spellings are his own. The exact quotations from the *Ain-i-Akbari* are from H. Blochmann's public-domain translation of Volume I (1873) and H. S. Jarrett's of Volumes II–III (1891–94): the account of the descriptive rolls and the imperial brand, including the *tattu* that looked like an ass, the admission that horse borrowing was then the order of the day, and the closing remark about the thinking man; the four classes of recipients of *madad-i-ma'ash*, including the men of gentle birth unable to take up a trade; and the provincial notices of zamindars with their castes and their forces in horse and foot, including Baglana under a Rathor, the Gohel tract managed by the Brahman Tewari, the Hatkars near Basim, Banjara under a woman, and the Gond chief with the diamond mine. Blochmann's editorial notes, also public domain, supply the observation that jagirs were frequently changed after Akbar's time, the tabulation of Hindu rank-holders in the Ain's lists, and the translated passage from Badauni on the amirs holding the country as jagir and producing no useful soldiers — a hostile witness, and treated as one. Abu'l Fazl's stated reason for listing the grandees by name and rank alone is paraphrased from a modern translation and not quoted.

The modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: M. Athar Ali and Irfan Habib on the evolution of the *zat* and *sawar* ranks and the eighteenth regnal year, on which the literature is agreed as to the fact and divided as to the earlier history of numerical rank; Irfan Habib on the nature of zamindari right, on nested claims in land, and on the accounting of *watan* revenue against a chief's salary; A. Jan Qaisar and Shireen Moosvi on the concentration of revenue claims; John F. Richards on the composition of the nobility and the *khanazad*; and the recent work on Mughal legal practice which documents zamindari transferred, gifted, bought and sold. Contested figures are given as ranges or with their basis stated. The rank-holder totals of 1,803 for 1595, 3,243 for 1637 and 14,499 for 1690 are the standard series and rest on different sources of differing quality. The concentration figures — some eighty-two per cent of assessed revenue resources to 1,671 rank-holders under Akbar, upwards of eighteen per cent to the top twelve, and just under sixty-two per cent to 445 men under Shah Jahan — describe salary claims calculated from assessed revenue on paper, not cash received, and

the divergence between assessed and realised revenue is a subject for the extraction module rather than a settled quantity here. The proportion of Hindu rank-holders is given as a little over a fifth across three reigns, on tabulations that differ in their base and their cut-off ranks. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

Without the Intermediate Assistance of Any One

The robe — a sovereignty claim written in the vocabulary of piety and cut for several audiences at once; with the emperor's theology set beside the document his own ulama signed against their convictions

Two texts

Here is how Abu'l Fazl opens the *Ain-i-Akbari*'s account of what a king is:

"Royalty is a light emanating from God, and a ray from the sun, the illuminator of the universe, the argument of the book of perfection, the receptacle of all virtues. Modern language calls this light farr-i izadi (the divine light), and the tongue of antiquity called it kiyan khura (the sublime halo). It is communicated by God to kings without the intermediate assistance of any one, and men, in the presence of it, bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission."

He goes on to list the qualities that flow from possessing the light, and the first of them is a paternal love towards the subjects, of which he says: *"Thousands find rest in the love of the King; and sectarian differences do not raise the dust of strife."*

And here is a clause from the petition the leading Muslim jurists of the empire signed in the month of Rajab, 987 — the summer of 1579:

"Should therefore in future a religious question come up, regarding which the opinions of the Mujtahids are at variance, and His Majesty in his penetrating understanding and clear wisdom be inclined to adopt, for the benefit of the nation, and as a political expedient, any of the conflicting opinions, which exist on that point, and issue a decree to that effect, we do hereby agree that such a decree shall be binding on us and on the whole nation."

These two documents are the same claim in two registers, and between them they contain almost everything this module has to establish. The first is theology and reads like devotion. The second is a legal opinion and reads like procedure. Both do one thing: they remove any human institution standing between God and the emperor. The load-bearing words in Abu'l Fazl are *without the intermediate assistance of any one*, and the load-bearing words in the petition are *we do hereby agree*.

What the *mahzar* actually says

The document of 1579 is usually called Akbar's infallibility decree, and it declares nothing of the kind. Its precision is the point, so it has to be read as written.

It opens by observing that Hindustan has become a place of security and peace, so that learned men and lawyers have immigrated and settled there — flattery, but flattery with a function, since it establishes the signatories as men of standing. It then cites two proof-texts: the Quranic injunction to obey God, the Prophet, and those who have authority among you; and the tradition that the man dearest to God on the day of judgment is the just *imam*, obedience to whom is obedience to God and rebellion against whom is rebellion against God. From these it derives its first proposition: *"we have agreed that the rank of Sultan-i-'adil is higher in the eyes of God than the rank of a Mujtahid."*

Then the operative machinery. Where the *mujtahids* — the jurists qualified to reason independently from the sources — are *at variance*, the emperor may adopt whichever of the conflicting opinions he judges beneficial, and his decree binds everyone. Beyond that, should he think fit to issue an entirely new order, *"we and the nation shall likewise be bound by it, provided always that such order be not only in accordance with some verse of the Qur'an, but also of real benefit to the nation."* And the sanction: opposition to such an order *"shall involve damnation in the world to come, and loss of property and religious privileges in this."*

It closes by describing itself: *"This document has been written with honest intentions, for the glory of God, and the propagation of the Islam, and is signed by us, the principal 'Ulama and lawyers."*

Consider what has just happened. The instrument that transfers the interpretive veto from the clerical body to the throne is not a decree, not a proclamation, not an act of force. It is a petition, drafted by clerics, addressed upward, grounded in two texts no Muslim jurist could dispute, hedged with conditions that sound like limits — the order must accord with a Quranic verse, it must benefit the nation — and signed by the very men it disempowers. It concedes only what was already technically true in Sunni jurisprudence, that where qualified opinion divides there must be some way of settling the question; and it locates the settlement in the emperor.

Badauni, who was in the room and hated it, supplies what the document cannot. All signed, he says, *"some willingly and the rest against their convictions."* The draft presented to the emperor was in the handwriting of Shaikh Mubarak — the father of Abu'l Fazl and of the poet Faizi, a man who had been persecuted by the orthodox establishment for years — and Shaikh Mubarak added below his signature that he signed most willingly, this being a matter he had for several years been anxiously

looking forward to. And Badauni states the consequence with a bitterness that is itself evidence of its accuracy: once the emperor had the document, *"the road of deciding any religious question was open; the superiority of the intellect of the Imam was established, and opposition was rendered impossible."*

The procedure that produced it

The *mahzar* did not appear from nowhere. It was the terminus of a procedure that had been running for four years in a building at Fatehpur Sikri, and the procedure is more instructive than the document.

The *Ibadat Khana*, the house of worship, began as a Thursday-evening gathering to which the emperor *"invited Sayyids, Shaikhs, Ulama, and Amirs."* The first thing that happened, Badauni records, is that *"ill-feeling arose in the company about the seats and order of precedence,"* so the emperor assigned each group a compass point — amirs on the east, sayyids on the west, ulama on the south, shaikhs on the north — and went from party to party in turn, conversing with each and, in Badauni's phrase, ascertaining their thoughts. Perfume was burned in quantity and money was distributed. And then, on one particular night, in a sentence that ought to be famous: *"All at once one night the vein of the neck of the Ulama of the age swelled up, and a horrid noise and confusion ensued."*

The emperor was angry at the rudeness and told Badauni that in future he should report any of the ulama who talked nonsense and could not behave themselves, so that they might be made to leave the hall. Badauni murmured to a neighbour that if he carried out that instruction most of the ulama would have to go, whereupon the emperor overheard, asked what had been said, and — Badauni notes with evident satisfaction — was highly pleased and repeated the remark to the men sitting near him.

Around the same period came the episode of the marriages. Akbar wished to exceed the number of wives permitted under Hanafi law; the chief *qazi*, Ya'qub, would not give the ruling. The emperor dismissed him on the spot, appointed a Maliki jurist in his place, and had the ruling he wanted the same day. Badauni's summary: the veteran lawyers *"were the losers by this affair, and from this moment their power began to wane,"* and *"from this day forward the road of opposition and difference in opinion lay open, and remained so until His Majesty was appointed Mujtahid of the Empire."*

Read those two episodes together and the method is visible. The emperor did not refute the ulama and did not silence them. He convened them, seated them by faction, made them argue in his presence week after week until their disagreement was a matter of public record — and then, when they disagreed, he selected. The *Ibadat Khana* manufactured the very condition the *mahzar* was drafted to resolve. Where a body

claims a monopoly of interpretation, the cheapest way to break it is not to attack the claim but to demonstrate, in public and repeatedly, that the body cannot agree with itself; because a divided authority requires an arbitrator, and the arbitrator's chair is empty and waiting.

None of which requires believing that Akbar was insincere. The man sat through those nights for years, extended the invitations in due course to Hindu pandits, Jain teachers, Zoroastrians and the Jesuits who arrived from Goa in 1580, put questions, took notes, and by every account including his enemies' was genuinely and restlessly curious about what was true. The curiosity was real and the procedure was effective, and this study takes no position on which came first, because the framework's claim has never been that rulers are cynics. It is that acts have functions whether or not the actor is calculating, and that the functions can be read off the record.

Several garments, worn at once

What Akbar assembled after 1579 was not one legitimating story but at least three, running simultaneously, addressed to audiences that did not overlap and were not expected to compare notes.

For the Muslim service class and the army there was the inherited apparatus, maintained and even elaborated: Timurid descent, the title of *ghazi* taken after Khanwa and carried by his grandfather, the victory despatches in their Quranic register, the patronage of the Chishti shrines. Fatehpur Sikri itself was built around the establishment of the living Chishti saint Salim Chishti, to whom Akbar attributed the birth of his heir, and the emperor walked to Ajmer more than once. Nothing in the imperial vocabulary ever repudiated Islam, and the *mahzar* is signed for the propagation of it.

For the Hindu population and the Rajput nobility there was a different garment, assembled out of Indic material. The emperor appeared each day at sunrise at a window — the *jharokha* — to be seen by whoever gathered below, and the word used for that seeing was *darshan*, the Sanskrit term for the auspicious sight of a deity or a saint. The pilgrim tax went in 1563 and the *jizya* in 1564. A translation bureau turned the *Mahabharata* into Persian as the *Razmnama*, and after it the *Ramayana* and other Sanskrit works. Rajput houses entered the nobility with their homelands guaranteed, and their daughters entered the imperial household. In Rajput bardic tradition and in Sanskrit texts of the period, Akbar becomes a figure who can be accommodated within an Indian idea of sovereignty rather than an alien conqueror to be endured.

And for the inner circle and the philosophically inclined there was a third garment, the illuminationist theology Abu'l Fazl assembled from the Persian tradition of Suhrawardi: the divine light descending directly on the one man fit to receive it in his age, the emperor as spiritual guide as well as ruler, and *sulh-i kul* — universal or absolute peace — as the condition that follows, since a sovereign who is the agent of God as such cannot prefer one of God's sects to another. Attached to this was the discipleship that later writers called the *Din-i Ilahi*, whose members undertook, in the formula Badauni copied out with horror, *"the four grades of entire devotion, viz., sacrifice of Property, Life, Honour, and Religion."*

Two devices held the whole arrangement together, and both are worth naming precisely because they are the mechanics of an ambiguity deliberately kept.

The first is the seal and the coinage. Akbar asked how it would be received if the words *Allahu Akbar* were cut on the imperial seal and the coin dies. Most said it would be well liked. Haji Ibrahim objected that the phrase was ambiguous — it can be read as *God is great*, and it can be read as *Akbar is God* — and proposed an unambiguous Quranic alternative. Badauni records that the emperor was much displeased, said that it was surely sufficient that no man who felt his weakness would claim divinity, and that *"he merely looked to the sound of the words."* The ambiguity was identified out loud, by a scholar, in the emperor's presence, and retained.

The second is the prostration. Full *sijda*, forehead to the ground, is owed to God and to no man, and to demand it of subjects is a serious charge against a Muslim ruler. Akbar's court instituted the same physical act under a different name — *zamin-bos*, the kissing of the ground — and Badauni notes the decree that *sijda* under that name ought to be offered to kings. And the theology arrives to meet the gesture in Abu'l Fazl's opening pages, where men in the presence of the divine light *"bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission."* The act is unchanged; the label passes the test; the doctrine explains why it was always proper.

What it cost the man who wrote it down

One episode deserves separate attention, because it shows what the settlement described in the last module did to the people who staffed the robe.

Akbar assembled Hindu scholars to expound the *Mahabharata* and spent several nights explaining the sense of it himself to Naqib Khan, so that the Khan could sketch the substance in Persian. On the third night he sent for Badauni and directed him to work on the translation. Badauni — who considered the enterprise blasphemous, who was in the room only because his stipend depended on it, and whose private history of the reign was written in secret and not published in his lifetime — did as he was told. In

three or four months he translated two of the eighteen books, *"at the puerile absurdities of which the eighteen thousand creations may well be amazed."* Faizi then worked the rough version into elegant prose and verse; another scholar revised it against the original word for word until, in Badauni's account, not a fly-mark of the Sanskrit was omitted.

And Badauni's own conclusion on the assignment: *"But such is my fate, to be employed on such works. Nevertheless, I console myself with the reflection, that what is predestined must come to pass."*

The most important robe-making project of the reign was carried out, in significant part, by a man who thought it damnable and had no way to decline. A scholar whose living was a revenue grant held at the emperor's pleasure — the *madad-i-ma'ash* of the last module, resumable and resumed — had nothing to bargain with. The settlement and the robe are not separate systems. The terms on which the empire held its scholars are the reason its scholars produced what it wanted.

Whose belief was being bought

The framework's test is expenditure and risk: an order's real audience is the one it pays for and takes chances for.

By that test the *jizya* and the pilgrim tax are decisive. Both were real revenue, both were surrendered permanently and early, neither was extracted from him by anyone in a position to compel it, and the *jizya* in particular carried three and a half centuries of precedent under every Muslim dynasty in India. Giving it up bought nothing tangible and cost something quantifiable. The payment names the audience: the Hindu subject population, and above all the Hindu chiefs whom the settlement was simultaneously bringing inside on hereditary terms. The robe follows the settlement — an empire that has just made Rajput houses hereditary partners needs a legitimating story those partners can stand inside.

The *mahzar* passes the same test from the other direction. It gained the emperor no revenue and no soldiers; what it bought was freedom of manoeuvre, and what it cost was the permanent enmity of a clerical establishment that had until then been able to say no. That the constraint had been real is demonstrated by what happened next: in 1580–81 a serious rebellion broke out in Bengal and Bihar, and a *qazi* issued an opinion declaring rebellion against Akbar lawful. The ulama's weapon was a legal ruling, which is exactly what the *mahzar* had been designed to take away from them, and the rising had to be put down by force.

The discipleship, by contrast, fails the test of scale so plainly that it should change how the thing is described. Its membership is usually put at around nineteen men, of

whom exactly one — Birbal — was a Hindu. Whatever the *Din-i Ilahi* was, it was never a religion offered to the empire; a religion for a hundred million people is not conducted with nineteen initiates. Read its formula again — property, life, honour and religion, surrendered to the sovereign — and what it most resembles is a vassal's oath expressed in devotional language, binding a handful of men at the very top by a tie that no faction, ethnicity or lineage could compete with. It belongs with the branding of horses rather than with the theology: an instrument of elite coordination, which is the subject of Module 8.

And note what is absent. There is no metropolitan audience anywhere in this structure. The landscape established that this conquest had no home treasury to satisfy, and the robe confirms it from the other end: every garment described above is cut for someone inside India. What the framework expects to find split across an ocean is here split across a single capital, between audiences who lived within a few miles of one another and heard different things.

Did it take?

The question that matters for anything built is whether it became furniture — whether the next generation experienced it as the way the world is rather than as a policy.

With the dynasty and the high nobility, yes. Jahangir and Shah Jahan continued the *jharokha* appearances and the weighing ceremonies without apparent strain; *sulh-i kul* remained the declared principle; Rajput houses competed for standing within the imperial order rather than against it, and Hindus remained a little over a fifth of the rank-holders through Shah Jahan's reign. For three generations the Mughal emperor was, for a great many Indians who were not Muslims, simply the legitimate sovereign.

With the ulama, never. Badauni is the proof: a man who ate the emperor's bread, translated the emperor's books, attended the emperor's debates, and wrote a secret history so hostile that it could not be shown to anyone until after both he and Akbar were dead. A robe that produces that is not the furniture of reality for the people wearing it.

And it was reversible, which is the hard finding. In his eleventh regnal year Aurangzeb discontinued the *jharokha darshan* as a non-Islamic practice and a form of idol-worship, and ended the ceremonial weighing. Hindu religious fairs were prohibited in 1668 and new temple construction restricted from 1669; internal customs on Hindu merchants were set at double the Muslim rate from 1665; and in 1679 the *jizya* was reimposed, against the advice of a number of his own nobles and

theologians. A century of imperial ideology was taken off in about a decade, by one man, using the same machinery.

Two things follow, and they pull in opposite directions, so both should be stated. The first is that a legitimating structure a successor can simply reverse was never naturalised in the sense that matters; it was policy at the apex, not belief in the country. The second is that the reversal was extremely expensive — Rajput war, protracted conflict with the Marathas, the alienation of the Sikh community, and a Deccan campaign that consumed the last quarter-century of the reign — which demonstrates that the thing being reversed had been doing real structural work. The robe was load-bearing without being furniture. That combination is unusual and the later modules will have to account for it.

A caution on Aurangzeb, since the temptation to make him the villain of an otherwise sunny story is exactly the sort of thing this collection exists to resist. The measures listed above are attested; their scale, their motives and their practical effect are all disputed in the current scholarship, which has questioned the older picture on several fronts — the number of temples actually destroyed against the number patronised, the fiscal as against the confessional function of the *jizya*, and the continued presence of Hindu officers in the administration throughout the reign. He is best read here not as a bigot interrupting a tolerant tradition but as an emperor who chose a different audience: reweighting the robe toward the Muslim service class and the orthodox establishment at a moment when the throne needed them, and paying for it in the coin of everyone else's consent.

Reading the Mughal robe against the framework

The refinement this module contributes has three parts, and the first is the one the whole module exists to establish.

Sulh-i kul is not a policy of tolerance. It is a sovereignty claim, and tolerance is its by-product. If royalty is a light communicated by God to kings *without the intermediate assistance of any one*, then no clerical body validates the ruler and none can invalidate him; and the same clause obliges him not to prefer any sect, because to prefer one is to concede that it has a claim on him which the others lack. The freedom from the ulama and the equal treatment of Hindus are not two policies, one hard-headed and one high-minded. They are one move, seen from two sides. This is why the long argument about whether Akbar was sincerely tolerant or cunningly pragmatic has never resolved and cannot: the structure makes the question ill-formed. He could believe every word of it and it would still do exactly this work.

Second: where an order's legitimating clergy is a separable institution with its own body of law, the cheapest attack is arbitration rather than suppression. Killing clerics makes martyrs and invites rulings. Convening them, seating them by faction, and letting their disagreement become a matter of public record makes an arbitrator necessary — and the throne is the only candidate. The *mahzar* is the cleanest instance of this manoeuvre this collection has yet examined: nobody was killed, the vocabulary never left the Quran and the traditions, the document was drafted by a cleric and signed by clerics, its stated purpose was the propagation of Islam, and the veto changed hands permanently. Where the framework has generally treated the robe as something an order tells its subjects, this case shows the robe being used as a weapon against the specialists who previously owned it.

Third, and this is a genuine amendment to the seam: the seam can run between audiences rather than between places. The colonial studies in this collection found the seam split geographically — what the metropole was told and what the colony lived, held apart by an ocean and a two-month post. Here there is no ocean and no metropole, and the seam runs instead between groups living in the same city: the ulama who were told the empire propagated Islam, the Rajput chief who was shown a sovereign taking *darshan* at a window, and the nineteen men of the inner circle who swore away property, life, honour and religion to a man who was the light of the age. These accounts were not translations of one another and were not meant to be reconciled. What kept them from colliding was not distance but the fact that their audiences did not read each other's documents — and the one man who did read all of them, and understood exactly what he was looking at, wrote it down in secret and hid the manuscript for the rest of his life. **Audience segmentation is a substitute for geography**, and an order's most dangerous person is whoever stands at more than one address.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Abu'l Fazl are from H. Blochmann's public-domain translation of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Volume I (1873): the definition of royalty as a light emanating from God communicated without the intermediate assistance of any one, before which men bend the forehead of praise towards the ground of submission; and the passage on paternal love in which thousands find rest in the love of the King and sectarian differences do not raise the dust of strife. Blochmann's transliterations have been silently normalised where the scanned text is corrupt; no English wording has been altered.

The exact quotations from 'Abd al-Qadir Bada'uni are from W. H. Lowe's public-domain translation of the *Muntakhabu-t-Tawarikh*, Volume II (1884): the full text of the *mahzar* of Rajab 987, including the propositions that the rank of a just sultan

stands higher before God than that of a *mujtahid*, that a decree settling a disputed question is binding, that opposition involves damnation and loss of property and religious privileges, and the document's self-description as written for the glory of God and the propagation of Islam; Badauni's note that the signatories were divided between the willing and the unwilling and that the draft was in Shaikh Mubarak's hand; the founding of the *Ibadat Khana*, the quarrel over precedence, the swelling of the vein of the neck of the ulama, and the exchange with the emperor about which of them should be made to leave the hall; the dismissal of Qazi Ya'qub and the observation that from that day the road of opposition lay open; the *Allahu Akbar* seal and Haji Ibrahim's objection, with the emperor's reply that he merely looked to the sound of the words; the decree that *sijda* under the name of *zamin-bos* ought to be offered to kings; the formula of the four grades of devotion — property, life, honour and religion; and the account of the *Mahabharata* translation, including Badauni's verdict on the puerile absurdities and his consolation that what is predestined must come to pass. Badauni is a hostile witness who wrote in secret, and is used here as such: his facts are generally corroborated where they can be checked, his judgements are his own, and his account of the *mahzar* is the only full text of that document in English translation in the public domain.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: on Abu'l Fazl's debt to Suhrawardi's illuminationism and the political consequence of *farr-i izadi*, the standard accounts by John F. Richards, Iqtidar Alam Khan and A. Azfar Moin; on Rajput and Sanskrit reception of Mughal sovereignty, Cynthia Talbot and Audrey Truschke; on Aurangzeb's measures and their contested interpretation, the older narrative summarised in Jadunath Sarkar's tradition against the substantial revisions of the last two decades, Truschke's among them. Contested points are flagged rather than resolved. The membership of the discipleship is conventionally given as about nineteen and rests on later report rather than a register; the date of Akbar's discontinuation of the pilgrim tax is given as 1563 in most accounts and 1562 in some; the eleventh regnal year is the standard date for Aurangzeb's ending of the *jharokha* and is stated in regnal rather than Gregorian form because the sources do; and the scale and motive of the later religious measures remain actively disputed. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 4

They Had Kept This Shop Warm

Formation — an empire that wrote a curriculum and built no schools, formed its service class superbly and everyone else not at all, and watched new formations grow in the ground it had left open

The thing being measured

Formation, in this framework, is not schooling and not propaganda. It is the process by which a person is given the cast of the world before he is able to assess it: who his natural superiors are, which sources of information are trustworthy, what the year is shaped like, what is sacred and therefore not up for discussion, and which people are his own. *The Exploit* sets out why this is the most powerful thing anyone can hold — not because children are gullible, since they are not, but because all five of the mind's trust dispositions are installed most durably before the vigilance that would screen them has matured, and because a belief laid down before one could refuse it and then buried under a life built upon it is defended in adulthood not as a proposition that might be updated but as the ground of the self.

Two consequences follow, and the second is the one this module turns on. The first is that whoever holds formation holds the cheapest possible instrument of rule, because a population that has been formed to see the order as the shape of reality requires very little force. The second is that **there is no unformed person.** To be unformed is not to be neutral; it is to be feral, and no society produces feral adults in any number. Every child is formed by somebody. If a ruling order declines to do it, the formation already running does not stop — it simply keeps the field.

The colonial studies in this collection found that withholding, and found a specific reason for it: to form Kenyans as Englishmen would have been to admit them, and admission carried rights. So the English formed a thin administrative class and left the rest, and the rest were formed anyway, by what was already there, and in due course became the problem.

The Mughal case withholds formation from the overwhelming majority just as completely. But the colonial explanation does not apply to it at all, and working out what does is the business of this module.

A curriculum, and no schools

The empire was not indifferent to education. It had a stated policy, set out in the twenty-fifth *ain* of the second book, and by the standards of the sixteenth century anywhere it is a striking document.

It opens with a complaint about existing practice: *"In every country, but especially in Hindustan, boys are kept for years at school, where they learn the consonants and vowels. A great portion of the life of the students is wasted by making them read many books."* Against this it prescribes a method with the impatience of a man who has thought about it. The boy is to learn to write the letters and trace their forms, which *"may be done in two days"*; then the joined letters, *"practised for a week"*; then prose and poetry committed to memory; then daily practice at a hemistich or a verse until he acquires a current hand. The teacher is to attend to five things — the letters, the meanings of words, the hemistich, the verse, and the previous lesson. And Abu'l Fazl claims for the method a result that gives away the reformer's temperament: a boy will learn in a month, or even in a day, what took others years, *"so much so that people will get quite astonished."*

Then the syllabus, and it repays reading in full because of what stands where. Every boy ought to read books on *"morals, arithmetic, the notation peculiar to arithmetic, agriculture, mensuration, geometry, astronomy, physiognomy, household matters, the rules of government, medicine, logic,"* the natural, mathematical and metaphysical sciences, *"and history."* Theology does not head the list; it is not on the list at all except as the last of the three philosophical sciences. And then a sentence that no previous Indo-Muslim administration would have written: *"In studying Sanscrit, students ought to learn the Byakaran, Niyai, Bedanta, and Patanjal."* Grammar, Nyaya logic, Vedanta, and the Yoga of Patanjali — prescribed, in an imperial manual, to the empire's students. The section closes: *"No one should be allowed to neglect those things which the present time requires."*

Now look for the apparatus. There is none. There is no ordinance establishing schools, no assignment of revenue to maintain them, no provision for teachers' salaries, no inspectorate, no compulsion, no enrolment figures, and no statement of who the students are. In a document that counts elephants by class, prices horses by breed, and records the horse and foot of every zamindar in every district, education has a method and a reading list and not one number.

School-building appears elsewhere, once, in a list of the emperor's public works: caravanserais built everywhere for the comfort of travellers, tanks and wells dug for the benefit of men and the improvement of the soil, and then — *"Schools and places of worship are being founded, and the triumphal arch of knowledge is newly adorned."*

Schools sit in that sentence exactly where wells sit: as pious works a good ruler endows, one at a time, as occasion and merit arise.

That is the shape of the thing. The empire held an opinion about education, an unusually enlightened one, and addressed it to institutions it did not own, attended by a stratum that was already coming to them. It had a curriculum. It did not have a system, and never proposed to build one.

The formation the empire did run

It does not follow that the Mughals formed nobody. They ran one formation with great success, and it went extraordinarily deep — but it was a professional formation for a service class, and its instrument was a language.

In the early 1580s, in the course of Todar Mal's revenue reorganisation, Persian was made the language of accounts at every level of the administration, displacing the local languages in which district and provincial records had previously been kept. Consider what that order does when the empire in question is the principal employer, landlord and creditor in northern India. It means that any family wishing to have a share in the handling of imperial money — and the intermediary layer of Module 2 handled a great deal of it — must from that moment put its sons through Persian. Not as an accomplishment. As a trade.

They did, in very large numbers, and the families that did it most successfully were Hindu. The Kayasthas and Khatris, scribal and mercantile castes with an older tradition of record-keeping, went into Persian and took it over. Muzaffar Alam's study of the language's rise names the line of them — Chandar Bhan Brahman, Sujan Rai, Madho Ram, Anand Ram Mukhlis, Bindraban Khwushgo, Tek Chand Bahar — men who were not merely competent in Persian but became authorities in it, producing the lexicons, the manuals of idiom and the models of epistolary style on which the next generation was trained. Their works entered the *madrasa* syllabus. A letter written by Chandar Bhan Brahman to his son Tej Bhan became a standard text of instruction for trainee *munshis*, which is to say that Muslim and Hindu clerks alike learned their profession from a Hindu Brahman's advice to his boy, in Persian, about how to conduct oneself.

And this was formation in the full sense the framework means, not merely training. What came with the language was the *akhlaq* tradition of ethics and comportment, the Persian classics learned by heart, and *adab* — a whole specification of what an accomplished person is, how he speaks, what he finds admirable, whom he defers to and why. It supplied a cast of the world in which the *padshah* stands at the natural apex, in which service is the honourable path, and in which the man of cultivation is

recognisable across every confessional line. It was installed young, on boys, over years, and it took so completely that it outlived the thing it served: Persian remained the language of record in India until 1837, well over a century after the empire had ceased to be an empire in anything but name.

That is a first-class formation, and it is worth being precise about its reach. It formed the people who ran the machine — clerks, accountants, *qanungos*, *munshis*, officers, and the households that produced them. In a population somewhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty million, it reached a literate service stratum. Below that stratum it did nothing at all, and was not designed to.

Why the rest were left

The colonial answer does not work here, because there was nothing to admit anyone to. "Mughal" was not a membership category. It was a dynasty and, by extension, the people who served it; there was no citizenship, no franchise, no body of rights that forming a peasant as an imperial subject would have obliged the emperor to concede. The English withheld formation from Kenyans because forming them would have created a claim. The Mughals withheld it from the Indian peasantry because forming him would have created nothing — for them or for him.

The real answer is in the machine the previous three modules have described, and it is simply that nothing in that machine ever ran on the cultivator's conviction.

The floor of force was built against fortified places, not against villages, because the landscape had established that the cultivator could not be pinned and did not need to be. The settlement routed the revenue through hereditary intermediaries who held their positions by inheritance, could not move their forts, and could be compelled — so what the empire required from the countryside was not belief but a zamindar's compliance, which force and money could buy directly. The robe was cut for the Muslim service class, the ulama and the Rajput chiefs, all of whom could withhold something the empire needed. And the emperor's own numbers show why the peasant was not on the list: he had never been asked to supply anything except a share of his crop, which was collected from him by a man who lived in the same district and knew where his fields were.

An order forms the populations whose belief it actually needs. This one had found a cheaper route to the same revenue, and so it bought no formation at the base, and the enormous cost of forming tens of millions of people was never incurred because the return on it was never required.

What that leaves is a formation field of continental size, occupied by whoever was already there and open to whoever might arrive.

The calendar, and what it actually tests

At one point the empire did reach for the strongest formation instrument there is, and the outcome is the cleanest experiment in this module.

In March 1584, in his twenty-ninth regnal year, Akbar promulgated a new calendar — the *Tarikh-i Ilahi*, the divine era — devised with the help of the astronomer Fathullah Shirazi. It was solar, in a region where the Islamic reckoning was lunar; each day of the month carried its own name; and its year one was back-dated to the emperor's accession in November 1556. As an object it is the ambition of the reign in miniature: a synthetic calendar assembled with knowledge of the Hindu, Iranian, Jain and Christian reckonings in use across the empire, and numbered from the coronation of the man who commissioned it.

The stated reason for it was fiscal, and Abu'l Fazl gives it plainly: the lunar year runs some eleven days short of the solar, so that thirty-one lunar years pass in thirty solar ones, and revenue assessed and collected on the lunar reckoning drifts steadily away from the harvest that pays it. The peasant was being asked for money before the crop existed. Fixing that is not ideology; it is arithmetic with a plough attached.

The result divides exactly along that line, and the division is the finding. As an *era* — as a way of numbering the years from the emperor's accession — the Ilahi calendar was little used outside the court and was effectively abandoned after Akbar's death. Nobody's grandchildren counted their birthdays in it. But in Bengal, where the same reform met the local solar reckoning and was pegged to the spring harvest and the day the collector came, it fused with what was there and became the Bangla San, and it is in use today: the Bengali year is still counted on a system whose zero point is Akbar's accession, four hundred and forty years later, in two countries that did not exist when it was set. Its precise parentage is disputed — some attribute the Bengali reckoning to the sultans of Bengal before Akbar, and the mechanism of the fusion is not fully agreed — but the survival is not in doubt.

Read the two outcomes together and the lesson about the instrument is exact. The calendar is indeed among the most powerful formative devices there is, and it is far more than a priestly trick: it is the thing that tells a person what the year is shaped like, when to work and when to fast and when to celebrate, and it does that work on a child before he can consider it. But it does that work only where it structures the year the child actually lives. Sowing, harvest, the festival, the fast, the day the man with the ledger arrives — a calendar that governs those becomes the shape of time itself and cannot be dislodged by decree. A calendar that merely renumbers the years from a coronation touches nothing anybody lives through, forms nobody, and dies with the

administration that issued it. Akbar got both results from a single reform, which is as close to a controlled experiment as this material ever offers.

The shop that stayed warm

Now the passage that names the module, and it should be read in full because the emperor is describing, accurately and with contempt, precisely the thing his empire had never built.

Jahangir, recording the events of his first regnal year:

"In Gobindwal, which is on the river Biyah (Beas), there was a Hindu named Arjun, in the garments of sainthood and sanctity, so much so that he had captured many of the simple-hearted of the Hindus, and even of the ignorant and foolish followers of Islam, by his ways and manners, and they had loudly sounded the drum of his holiness. They called him Guru, and from all sides stupid people crowded to worship and manifest complete faith in him. For three or four generations (of spiritual successors) they had kept this shop warm. Many times it occurred to me to put a stop to this vain affair or to bring him into the assembly of the people of Islam."

"At last when Khusrau passed along this road this insignificant fellow proposed to wait upon him... He behaved to Khusrau in certain special ways, and made on his forehead a finger-mark in saffron, which the Indians call qashqa, and is considered propitious. When this came to my ears and I clearly understood his folly, I ordered them to produce him and handed over his houses, dwelling-places, and children to Murtaza Khan, and having confiscated his property commanded that he should be put to death."

Four things are in that passage, and each is diagnostic.

He sees the formation, and describes its mechanism correctly. Three or four generations of successors keeping a shop warm is an exact, if contemptuous, description of institutional transmission across time — a lineage of teachers, each authorising the next, so that the trust attaches to the office rather than to the man. It is the collar, seen from outside by someone who does not know he is looking at one.

He sees that it crosses his categories. It has captured Hindus *and* Muslims — a formation that does not respect the confessional map on which the empire's whole robe is organised, and which therefore cannot be managed by any of the empire's instruments for managing Hindus or managing Muslims.

He names the two real options and takes neither. *Put a stop to this vain affair* — suppression — *or bring him into the assembly of the people of Islam* — absorption, which is to say formation, bringing the thing inside and re-forming it. He considered both, repeatedly, for years, and did nothing, because until the guru did something

political there was no occasion, and the empire had no standing apparatus that would have made absorption possible.

And the trigger, when it comes, is not doctrinal at all. Guru Arjan marked the forehead of Khusrau, Jahangir's rebel son. It is a political offence, punished politically: property confiscated, family handed to a noble, execution ordered. The one instrument the empire reached for is the one it had in abundance and the only one that cannot touch a formation.

What followed is the demonstration. Killing a teacher removes a man; it does not unform the taught, and it supplies the community with the single most powerful cue in the whole repertoire — a costly display of sincerity, a man who paid everything rather than recant, which is exactly the signal human vigilance is built to trust and cannot easily discount. Arjan's son Hargobind took up arms and built a fortified centre; the community acquired a military dimension it had not previously had. Seventy years later Aurangzeb executed the ninth guru, Tegh Bahadur, at Delhi. And in 1699 the tenth instituted the Khalsa: an initiation with water and a double-edged blade, a common name taken by every initiate, a code of conduct, and visible marks carried on the body at all times.

Set that against *The Exploit*'s account of what makes formation durable and it is a catalogue: initiation, identity fusion, a shared name that overwrites lineage, a costly and visible commitment that cannot be hidden, sacred values placed beyond negotiation, and a founding narrative of martyrdom transmitted to children. The empire's response to a formation it could not match was to attack it with the sword, and the effect of the sword was to make the formation stronger, better-defined, more visibly marked, and armed. That is not a Mughal failure of intelligence. It is a structural fact about the instrument: force is the wrong tool for this job in every case, and its characteristic result is to supply the thing it attacks with its best evidence.

The others

The Sikh case is the sharpest but it is not isolated. The century and a half of Mughal peace was, in the field the empire had left open, one of the most fertile periods of formation-building in Indian history — which is exactly what a long, stable, prosperous order with a vacant formation field should be expected to produce.

Tulsidas composed the *Ramcharitmanas*, traditionally dated to 1574, in Awadhi rather than Sanskrit — putting the story of Ram, with its whole moral architecture of duty, kingship and devotion, into a language ordinary people in the Gangetic plain actually spoke, in verse designed to be recited and heard. It became, and remains, the single most formative text of the Hindi-speaking north, absorbed by children who

would never read a word of Sanskrit. Chaitanya's movement transformed devotional life in Bengal and built the Vrindavan establishments, some of which held Mughal revenue grants. The Kabir and Dadu traditions carried a formation explicitly hostile to both Brahminical and clerical authority. And the Chishti *dargahs*, which the emperors patronised without ever controlling, went on doing what they had done since the thirteenth century: forming Indian Muslims around shrines, saints and lineages that owed the court nothing.

And in the Deccan, in the empire's second century, the same manufacture the landscape found among the early-medieval Rajputs was performed again. When Shivaji was crowned in 1674, a Brahmin was brought from Benares to certify his Kshatriya status and conduct the rites, supplying by ritual what the genealogy would not supply by itself. A conquest-in-progress acquiring the sanction that turns capacity into legitimate claim, in the seventeenth century, in the middle of the empire's own territory, using the same machinery the empire had never bothered to control.

The pattern is not subtle. The two forces that occupied the last century of Mughal power — the Sikhs in the Punjab and the Marathas in the west and centre — were carried by formations that crystallised *during* Mughal rule, in the field the empire had declined to enter, and partly in reaction to it.

The exception, and what it shows

There was one population the Mughals genuinely did re-form, and the method is instructive because it was not a school.

The Rajput houses were formed through the household and the career. Chiefs' sons went to court; they were given rank as boys; they learned Persian and the manners of the imperial service; they campaigned alongside the princes; and daughters passed into the imperial harem so that within two generations the emperor and the Kachhwaha raja were kin. Raja Man Singh, who commanded imperial armies for decades and governed Bengal and Bihar and Kabul, was formed by this process as thoroughly as any Turani. The result held for a century and a half: Rajput houses fought hard, and fought other Rajputs, in the empire's service.

But note what it reached. It formed families — chiefs, their heirs, their immediate households — and it did not form clans. The clansman followed his chief because his chief was his chief, which is the older formation doing the work; and when a chief broke with the empire, as Mewar had done and as Marwar did in the 1670s, the clan broke with him. What the empire had formed was a layer of individuals, held to it by rank, marriage, career and proximity. Beneath that layer the formation that told a Rajput cultivator whom to follow was not the emperor's and never had been.

Reading Mughal formation against the framework

Three refinements, all of them corrections to the way the collection has so far handled this module.

First: formation is withheld because it is expensive and the order has found a cheaper route to the same revenue — not, in the first instance, because forming people would admit them. The colonial studies found exclusion doing the work: to form the colonised as members of the metropolitan nation would create a claim, so a thin administrative class was formed and the rest were left. This case has the same withholding with none of that logic available, because there was no membership to confer and no rights to be claimed. What it has instead is a machine that never needed the base's conviction: force applied to forts, revenue routed through hereditary intermediaries, a robe cut for the audiences who could withhold something. **The general rule is that an order forms the populations whose belief its extraction actually requires, and no others.** Colonial exclusion is one reason a cheaper route gets chosen; it is not the only one, and where it is absent, cost alone is sufficient.

Second, and this is the substantive amendment: an unentered formation field is fertile ground, not static ground. The collection has so far described the prior formation "holding the field" — the Islamic order in Algeria, the indigenous order in Kenya, continuing because nothing displaced it. That is true here too: jati, village, Brahmin, household and *dargah* went on forming Indians throughout, entirely untouched. But this case shows something the colonial ones, being shorter, could not: over a century and a half of stable prosperous rule, the vacant field also filled with formations that had not previously existed — new scripture compiled and canonised, new initiations instituted, new martyrdoms transmitted to children, new vernacular texts that reached populations no earlier formation had reached. **A long peace is precisely the condition under which something new can be built in an unwatched formation field slowly enough to become the furniture of reality before anyone at the apex registers what has happened.** The empire's stability was the incubator of the formations that outlasted it.

Third, on the instrument itself: the calendar forms through the lived year, not through the decree. The Ilahi reform failed completely as an era and succeeded completely as a harvest reckoning, and both outcomes came out of the same order in the same year. The general principle is that a formative instrument works to the extent that it structures something a child lives through before he can assess it — the shape of the year, the round of festivals and fasts, the day the collector comes — and does no work at all where it is merely proclaimed. This is why formation is far more than a priestly trick, and also why an emperor cannot simply issue one.

And a corollary that runs through all three. **Force is the wrong instrument for formation in every case, and its characteristic effect is to strengthen what it attacks.** Jahangir understood exactly what he was looking at, named both real options — suppress or absorb — and, lacking any apparatus for the second, reached for the first. The shop stayed warm for three centuries more.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Abu'l Fazl are from H. Blochmann's public-domain translation of the *Ain-i-Akbari*, Volume I (1873): the twenty-fifth *ain*, "Regulations Regarding Education," including the complaint that boys are kept for years learning consonants and vowels and that a great portion of the students' lives is wasted, the prescribed method with its two days and its week, the full list of subjects, the direction that students of Sanskrit learn *Byakaran*, *Niyai*, *Bedanta* and *Patanjal*, and the closing instruction that no one should neglect what the present time requires; and the notice of public works in which schools and places of worship are being founded and the triumphal arch of knowledge is newly adorned. Blochmann's transliterations of the Sanskrit disciplines are reproduced as he gives them.

The exact quotation from Jahangir is from Alexander Rogers's translation, edited by Henry Beveridge, of the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (1909; Project Gutenberg text): the account of Guru Arjan at Gobindwal, the three or four generations who had kept this shop warm, the two courses the emperor had repeatedly considered, the saffron mark placed on Khusrau's forehead, and the order for confiscation and execution. This is the emperor's own memoir and is the principal contemporary source for the event; Sikh tradition gives a fuller and different account of the manner of Arjan's death, which the imperial text does not describe.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Muzaffar Alam, "The Pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal Politics" (*Modern Asian Studies*, 1998), for the rise of Persian, the Kayastha and Khatri *munshis* named here, and the entry of their compositions — including Chandar Bhan Brahman's letter to his son — into the training syllabus; Irfan Habib and the standard accounts of Todar Mal's reorganisation for the shift of revenue accounting into Persian in the early 1580s, whose precise date is given variously in the literature; Amartya Sen and the Bengali calendrical literature for the *Tarikh-i Ilahi* and its afterlife, where the attribution of the Bengali era is actively disputed — some scholars derive it from the pre-Mughal sultans of Bengal rather than from Akbar's reform, and the mechanism of the fusion is not settled; and the standard accounts of Sikh institutional history, the *Ramcharitmanas*, the Gaudiya and Kabir traditions, and Shivaji's coronation of 1674. The date of the *Ramcharitmanas* is traditional rather than documented. Population figures are as given in the landscape, between roughly 100 and 150 million for India around 1600 on competing methods.

The framework's account of formation, the five levers and the verification override is from *The Exploit*, whose modern cognitive-science sources are credited there. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 5

Though the Peasant Should Starve or Abscond

The cost column — why the ordinary cultivator complied for a century and a half, what compliance bought him, what refusal cost, and the exit the empire spent two hundred years failing to close

The ledger, written out by both parties

Bernier, trying to explain to a French correspondent why the richest country in the world looked the way it did, does something unusual: he writes out both sides of the account in the first person.

The peasant, he says, cannot avoid asking himself this question: *"Why should I toil for a tyrant who may come to-morrow and lay his rapacious hands upon all I possess and value, without leaving me, if such should be his humour, the means to drag on my miserable existence?"* And the assignment-holders, governors and revenue contractors reason in their turn: *"Why should the neglected state of this land create uneasiness in our minds? and why should we expend our own money and time to render it fruitful? We may be deprived of it in a single moment, and our exertions would benefit neither ourselves nor our children. Let us draw from the soil all the money we can, though the peasant should starve or abscond, and we should leave it, when commanded to quit, a dreary wilderness."*

This is a hostile foreigner's reconstruction of two conversations he never heard, and it is schematic in the way polemic is; it describes the Deccan-war decades rather than the whole two centuries; and Bernier had his own thesis to sell about the superiority of European property. It should not be taken as testimony. But it names the two variables this module has to measure, and it names the peasant's two exits — *starve or abscond* — with a precision the rest of the evidence bears out.

Who the common man was

The first correction is that there was no such person. The Mughal village was not a class; it was a small stratified society with the imperial demand landing on top of it, and the demand was then distributed inside the village by the village.

At the top of it stood the *khudkasht* — the resident cultivator, usually of the locally dominant caste, holding a hereditary right of occupancy in the fields he worked, which he could pass to his sons and in many places sell or mortgage. He was a member of the village body and had a voice in how the assessment was apportioned. Beside him worked the *pahikasht*, the outsider who cultivated land in a village not his own, holding no permanent right and generally on worse terms — but mobile, and, precisely because he was mobile, courted with better terms wherever land needed filling.

Below both were the artisan and service families — the potter, the carpenter, the barber, the washerman, the watchman — who worked for the village as a whole and were paid in fixed shares of the harvest rather than in coin, a relation of hereditary obligation rather than contract. And below them, in most of northern India, were the labouring and menial castes: families with no land, no occupancy right, no share in the village body, often ritually excluded from its wells and its lanes, working other men's fields for a subsistence share. They are the least documented people in the empire and were far and away the most numerous of its poor.

At the interface with the state stood two men, the *muqaddam* or headman and the *patwari* or village accountant, who kept the records, dealt with the collector, and took a percentage — the Ain provides for the headman to be allowed half a *biswah* on each *bigha* when the full assessment comes in, which is to say the empire paid the village's own man a commission for collecting from his neighbours.

That structure matters more than any figure in this module. The imperial officer did not meet sixty households. He met a headman and an accountant, agreed a total, and left. Who inside the village bore what share of it was settled by the village, according to caste, custom, standing and force. So for the great majority of the people this module is about, the person applying the pressure was not the emperor's servant. It was the man at the other end of the lane.

What was taken

The standard share under the *zabt* assessment worked out by Todar Mal around 1580 was one-third of the average produce, computed from ten-year averages of yield and price for each locality and converted to a fixed cash demand per unit of measured land. That figure is the empire's own headline, and three things need to be said about it.

First, it varied a great deal. Half was common in some provinces; the Ain's own account of Kashmir has the demand at a third in theory and two-thirds in practice until Akbar ordered it capped at a half. Reports of the mid-1650s suggest that what was actually realised ran to something over half the gross produce under *zabt* and around

two-thirds under crop-sharing, though these are administrative complaints and should be read as such.

Second, the *form* of the demand shifted the risk. A share of the crop taken at harvest moves with the harvest. A cash sum fixed in advance on measured land does not, and a bad year therefore falls entirely on the cultivator. The great administrative achievement of the reign — certainty, uniformity, an end to arbitrary assessment — bought that certainty by transferring the weather risk downward.

Third, the headline was not the whole demand, and the empire's own manual tells us so, in the act of forbidding the rest. The Ain instructs the collector to renounce *balkati*, the small fee taken from each village when the harvest is ready for reaping, and to waive *"all perquisites on handicrafts, market-booths, police, travelling passports, garden produce, temporary sheds, enclosure, fishing rights, port-dues, butter, oil of sesame, blanketing, leather, wool, and the like malpractices of the avaricious who fear not God."* Read that list not as a prohibition but as an inventory. Nobody legislates against fees on blanketing and sesame oil unless fees on blanketing and sesame oil are being collected. Every item on it was happening, at village level, on top of the third, and it is the empire's own catalogue of what its officers were actually taking. To it should be added *begar*, unpaid labour service, which the sources mention constantly and quantify never.

What compliance bought

The account has a credit side, and the framework's discipline requires it to be stated at full strength rather than gestured at.

The largest item is order. The landscape of 1526 was a country in which several hundred armed lordships fought each other, and by 1600 the number of people who could plunder a village in the Doab had been reduced very close to one. That is worth an enormous amount to a cultivator, and it is the benefit least visible in the record precisely because its evidence is the absence of events.

The second is money. The empire ran a trimetallic currency of unusual reliability, and the silver arriving from the Americas through the Levant and the Indian Ocean monetised the countryside to a remarkable degree — which meant a cultivator could sell a surplus, hold value, and pay in coin rather than in kind. A peasant in a cash economy has options a peasant in a grain economy does not.

The third is the set of protections the state wrote for itself. The chapter of the Ain on the *amalguzar* opens with the sentence *"Should be a friend of the agriculturist,"* and it is not empty. The collector is to establish himself *"where every one may have easy access to him without the intervention of a mediator."* He is to *"assist the needy husbandman with advances of money and recover them gradually"* — the *taccavi*

advance for seed and cattle, which is real credit at a moment when the alternative was the moneylender. If disaster strikes the crops after the estimates have gone in, he is to assess the loss on the spot, record it in writing and transmit it without delay so that a remission may be approved or a commissioner sent. He is to take nothing beyond the actual area under tillage. He is to begin the spring collection at Holi and the autumn collection at Dasahra — that is, at the Hindu festivals that mark the harvests, which is the empire fitting its demand to the cultivator's year rather than the other way round. And if a man is capable of farming more and there is no waste land in his village, the collector *"should allow him land in some other village."*

And the fourth item is the standard of living itself, which was not, by the measure of what followed, contemptible. The Ain's own wage schedule puts the lowest unskilled day-wage at two *dams*, and its price list puts wheat at twelve *dams* the *man* — so a day's unskilled labour bought something in the region of four kilogrammes of wheat in the Agra market. Shireen Moosvi's conversion of these figures into wheat wages, and the wider comparative work by Broadberry and Gupta and others, converge on a conclusion that should be stated plainly because it cuts against the usual picture: real wages in northern India *fell* between 1595 and the later nineteenth century. The comparisons are contested — the Ain's prices are Agra retail, the wage categories are urban, and rural labour is far worse documented — but the direction is broadly accepted. The subject of this module was not living at the bottom of Indian history. He was living near the top of it.

What refusal cost

Against which, the debit side, and here the empire's manual is equally candid.

The same chapter that makes the collector a friend of the agriculturist instructs him to deal with the recalcitrant *"by admonition and if this avail not, proceed to chastisement, nor should he be in apprehension of the land falling waste."* And a few lines later: *"if the husbandman cultivate less and urge a plausible excuse, let him not accept it."*

Those two sentences are the heart of this module and should be read slowly. The first tells the officer to punish, and then — anticipating the objection every collector would raise — tells him not to worry that punishment will drive the cultivator off and leave the fields empty. The second instructs him to treat any reduction in sown area as evasion by default. Together they are the imperial government arguing with its own officers about whether the peasant's threat to leave is credible, and instructing them to call it. You do not write that instruction unless the threat is being made and is being believed.

Beyond chastisement, arrears could be enforced against the person and the family. Bernier records that peasants unable to meet the demand *"are not only often deprived of the means of subsistence, but are bereft of their children, who are carried away as slaves."* Enslavement for revenue arrears is attested well enough across the sources, in Sind and elsewhere, that it cannot be dismissed as a foreigner's atrocity story, though its frequency cannot be established. Villages in open arrears could be dealt with by the *faujdar*, the district military officer, whose function was exactly this.

And the route of appeal, which the Ain provides in principle, was closed in practice by geography and cost. Bernier again: even granting a disposition to hear a complaint, *"how is a poor peasant or a ruined artisan to defray the expenses of a journey to the capital, and to seek justice at one hundred and fifty or two hundred leagues from home?"* Set that against the Ain's instruction that the collector should sit where everyone may reach him without a mediator, and the gap between the two is a fair summary of the whole module.

Then there is the pressure the state did not have to apply. Caste sanction, the authority of the village body, the threat of exclusion from the well and the lane and the marriage market — all of it operated continuously, cost the treasury nothing, and fell hardest on exactly the people with least. A man contemplating refusal was not weighing himself against the empire. He was weighing himself against his caste fellows, his headman, and the possibility that his family would be put outside the only community he had. In the terms of *The Exploit*, the coalitional lever was fully loaded before the imperial officer arrived, and it belonged to somebody else.

The exit

And still, running underneath all of it, was the thing the landscape found and the rest of this study has kept returning to: the cultivator could leave.

Babur wrote it down before he had governed a single monsoon — thorn jungle behind which *"the people of the pargana become stubbornly rebellious and pay no taxes,"* and villages *"depopulated and set up in a moment,"* re-founded elsewhere within a day and a half because the crops were rain-grown and needed no canal, no dam and no capital.

Bernier, a hundred and thirty years later, names the destinations. Peasants driven to despair *"abandon the country, and seek a more tolerable mode of existence, either in the towns, or camps; as bearers of burdens, carriers of water, or servants to horsemen. Sometimes they fly to the territories of a Raja, because there they find less oppression, and are allowed a greater degree of comfort."*

That last clause is the most important sentence in this module. The exit was not merely into the wilderness. It was into a competing jurisdiction — an autonomous chief's country a few days' walk away, deliberately offering better terms because a chief with land and no cultivators is a chief with no revenue. The Mughal empire was not a solid block of authority; the landscape established that it was a network of reduced forts, roads and assignments with unabsorbed lordships between them, and Bernier confirms that the emperor was *"not absolute master"* over several of the nations it comprehended. That patchwork, which Module 1 read as a limit on the floor of force, turns out to be the structural guarantee of the peasant's leverage: it created an internal market in jurisdictions, and a cultivator with a bullock and a family was the commodity being competed for.

The empire tried to close it. Assignment-holders claimed powers to detain cultivators on the land and to bring them back if they ran — Habib's phrase for the claim is that they treated them like serfs — and the manual's instruction not to fear the land falling waste is the same policy in the collector's ear. But the claim was made by the holder of a three-year assignment against a man who could be over the border in a week, into the territory of a rival who wanted him; and the *pahikasht*, the mobile cultivator with no rights anywhere, was simultaneously being offered inducements by every assignment-holder with empty fields. The empire fought the exit with one hand and bid for its beneficiaries with the other, because both were rational for the individual officer.

The cost column, in short, was never closed. The framework expects a stable order to rest on a ledger that comes out against refusal because the subject cannot leave, and the specific fact that makes the order a trap is normally the thing to identify. Here that fact does not exist. What existed instead was a ledger that came out in favour of staying — order, coin, credit, remission in bad years, a demand pegged to the harvest festivals, and a real wage that would not be equalled again for centuries — for as long as the terms held.

When the arithmetic changed

The terms did not hold, and the manner of their failure is the finding.

The stress test came first. In 1630 the rains failed in Gujarat and the Deccan, and there followed locusts, then excessive rain, then three successive crop failures, in a region already carrying Shah Jahan's army in the field. The mortality figures are observers' estimates and cannot be verified: about three million dead in Gujarat in the ten months to October 1631 is the figure usually given, with perhaps a million more around Ahmadnagar, and a Dutch report putting the whole regional toll at over seven

million, which is very probably too high. The imperial chronicle's own description of what people did to survive is unprintable in its details and was not disputed by anyone. The relief recorded is soup kitchens and almshouses at Surat and Ahmedabad and an order to distribute five thousand rupees.

Lay those two numbers beside each other — a treasury that assessed the empire's revenue in the hundreds of millions of rupees, and five thousand rupees against a famine that killed people in the millions — and leave the sum.

Then the slower change, which did the real damage. Through the second half of the seventeenth century the demand rose; the pool of assignable revenue shrank relative to the claims on it as the nobility grew; and assignments were transferred more and more frequently. Bernier's assignment-holder is not a greedier man than Akbar's. He is a man on a shorter lease. The same nominal share, taken by an officer who expects to hold a tract for twenty years and by one who expects to hold it for three, produces two entirely different situations for the cultivator, because the first has an interest in the man being alive and sowing next season and the second does not. *Let us draw from the soil all the money we can, though the peasant should starve or abscond* is not a description of avarice. It is a description of a lease.

And then, and only then, the ledger stopped balancing, and the risings began — very late, a century and a half after the founding.

In 1669 the Jats of the Mathura country rose under Gokula, a *zamindar* of Tilpat, and put something like twenty thousand men into the field, Jats with Gujjars and Ahirs among them. They killed the local *faujdar*, sacked a cantonment, disrupted the collection, and were broken by Mughal artillery at Tilpat; Gokula was executed at Agra by dismemberment on the first day of 1670. The rising joined a *zamindar* and his cultivators against the imperial revenue apparatus, which is exactly the alliance Habib identified as the standing structural possibility of the Mughal countryside — the intermediary and the peasant were natural allies against the assignment-holder, because the assignment-holder was extracting from both and would be gone in three years.

In 1672, at Narnaul, the Satnamis rose. This was the bottom of the village: peasants, artisans and landless labourers of low and untouchable castes, gathered around a devotional sect. The trigger, as the imperial chronicle itself records, was a foot soldier guarding a field who struck a Satnami with a stick. They killed the soldier, beat back the force sent against them, killed the *faujdar*, and marched on Delhi, acquiring a reputation for invulnerability that the Mughal nobility appears to have half-believed. They were destroyed. But note what was required: the empire had to put a field army into Haryana to deal with an argument about a crop.

The Jats rose again under Rajaram in the mid-1680s, better organised, using raiding rather than pitched battle, and in the course of it broke into Akbar's tomb at Sikandra. Their descendants ended the century with a state of their own.

The dating is the point. For a hundred and fifty years there was no general peasant revolt in the Mughal heartland — the cost column held, and it held because the credit side was real. When it broke, it broke in the reign in which the demand was highest, the assignments shortest, the transfers fastest, and the concessions of the Ain most completely forgotten.

Reading the Mughal cost column against the framework

Three refinements, and the third is the one that binds this module to the others.

First: where the exit is open, compliance is not extracted, it is purchased — and the price is legible in the order's own administrative literature. The framework's Module 5 asks what makes the order a trap, and expects to find a specific fact that closes the subject's options. Here no such fact exists. The Mughal peasant could go, and went, and the sources on both sides say so: the founder writes down the thorn jungle before he has a revenue system, and the foreign observer a century and a half later names the town, the camp and the neighbouring raja as the three doors. The consequence is that the empire had to compete for its cultivators, and the concessions show up not in rhetoric but in operating instructions — advances recovered gradually, remissions assessed on the spot after crop failure, collection timed to Holi and Dasahra, land offered in another village to a man who wanted more. **Where an order cannot fence its base, read its manuals for the inducements; they are the price of consent, quoted by the party paying it.** And read its instructions to its own officers for the argument about whether the threat is real: *nor should he be in apprehension of the land falling waste* is a state telling its agents to call a bluff it is not certain is a bluff.

Second: where a coercive social structure already exists beneath the state, the state extracts at levels that would otherwise require an army, because the enforcement is performed by neighbours at no cost to the treasury. The imperial officer met a headman and an accountant and agreed a figure. Everything below that — the apportioning, the pressure, the shaming, the ultimate sanction of exclusion — was caste and village business, running on machinery the empire had not built, did not pay for, and could not have replaced. This is the same finding the formation module reached from the other direction, and it is the single largest subsidy the Mughal state received from Indian society. It also means that for most of the people in this module, the framework's question — why comply with the empire? — was not the question

they faced. The question they faced was why comply with their neighbours, and the answer to that had been settled long before anyone in Delhi was consulted.

Third, and this is the substantive contribution: the cost column broke on the extractor's time horizon, not on the rate. The percentage rose over the seventeenth century, but not dramatically enough to explain what happened; what changed decisively was the frequency of transfer. A holder with a long horizon has an interest in the cultivator's survival, reinvestment and return next season; a holder with a three-year horizon has an interest in the maximum extractable now, and the peasant's starvation or flight is somebody else's problem by the time it arrives. **The variable that determines whether extraction is survivable is not the share taken but the length of the taker's tenure** — which means the Mughal agrarian crisis was manufactured by the Mughal elite settlement. The rotation of assignments existed to stop the nobility becoming a landed aristocracy that could challenge the throne, and it was brilliantly successful at that; Module 2 showed a service class that could accumulate nothing and therefore never combined. The same device, applied to the countryside, guaranteed that nobody with power over a village had any reason to care what happened to it after next harvest. The solution to the elite problem was the cause of the agrarian one, and no one at the apex could have unpicked the second without re-creating the first.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from the *Ain-i-Akbari* are from H. Blochmann's public-domain translation of Volume I (1873) for the wage schedule and price list, and H. S. Jarrett's of Volumes II–III (1891–94) for the chapter on the *amalguzar*: that he should be a friend of the agriculturist; that he should establish himself where everyone may have easy access without the intervention of a mediator; that he should proceed to chastisement and not be in apprehension of the land falling waste; that he should assist the needy husbandman with advances of money and recover them gradually; that he should not accept a plausible excuse for reduced cultivation; that he should allow a capable man land in another village; that collection should begin at Holi and at Dasahra; the provision for reporting crop disaster; the headman's commission of half a *biswah* on each *bigha*; and the list of perquisites and *balkati* he is to renounce. The reading of that prohibition list as an inventory of practice is this study's inference, not the Ain's statement.

The exact quotations from Bernier are from the public-domain Constable revision of Irving Brock's translation of *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668* (1891): the peasant's question and the revenue-holders' answer, including the phrase that gives this module its title; the account of children carried away as slaves for arrears; the flight to towns, camps and the territories of a raja; and the question of how a poor peasant is to defray a journey of two hundred leagues to seek justice. Bernier is a hostile and

interested witness writing chiefly about the 1650s and 1660s, and is used here as evidence of what an informed foreigner at the apex believed, corroborated where possible and flagged where not. The quotations from Babur on the thorn jungle and the mobility of villages are from Beveridge's *Bābur-nāma* as in the landscape.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Irfan Habib on the agrarian system, the *khudkasht* and *pahikasht* distinction, the claim of assignment-holders to detain cultivators, and the structural alliance of zamindar and peasant against the jagirdar; Shireen Moosvi on wages and prices and on the conversion of money wages into wheat wages; Stephen Broadberry and Bishnupriya Gupta, with the earlier controversy involving Desai, Heston and Mukerjee, on the long downward trend in Indian real wages between 1595 and the later nineteenth century, a trend broadly but not universally accepted; and the standard accounts of the risings. Contested figures are given as ranges or with their provenance stated. The revenue share is one-third of average produce as the *zabt* standard, running to a half and beyond regionally, with mid-1650s administrative reports suggesting realisation above half under *zabt* and around two-thirds under crop-sharing; these are complaint documents. The famine mortality figures — some three million in Gujarat in the ten months to October 1631, perhaps a further million around Ahmadnagar, and a Dutch estimate above seven million regionally — are contemporary observers' estimates, mutually inconsistent, and very probably high; the relief figure of five thousand rupees is as reported in the imperial chronicle tradition. Gokula's following of about twenty thousand is the conventional figure and rests on chronicle authority. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 6

Come at Length to Be Swallowed Up

Extraction — what was taken, in what medium, through whose hands, and which way it flowed; an empire whose revenue never left the country, whose treasury never saw four-fifths of it, and whose money could not move without bankers it did not own

Which direction

Every colonial study in this collection has had to trace a flow running one way: out. Bullion, cotton, rubber, ivory, tax receipts, the proceeds of monopolies — assembled in the conquered country, remitted to the metropole, and accounted for in a treasury on another continent. The measurement of that flow is normally the whole of an extraction module.

Here it runs the other way, and a Frenchman sitting in the imperial camp in the 1660s traced the route himself.

"It should not escape notice that gold and silver, after circulating in every other quarter of the globe, come at length to be swallowed up, lost in some measure, in Hindoustan."

Bernier then follows the money. Of the metal drawn from America and dispersed among the European states, part goes to Turkey to pay for imports and part to Persia by way of Smyrna for silk; Turkey, Yemen and Persia in turn cannot do without Indian goods, and so must ship gold and silver to Mocha on the Red Sea, to Basra at the head of the Persian Gulf, and to Bandar Abbas, where it is loaded for Hindustan by the vessels that come every year with the season of the winds. Indian, Dutch, English and Portuguese ships carrying Indian cargoes to Pegu, Siam, Ceylon, Aceh, Macassar, the Maldives and Mozambique bring back precious metal that shares the same fate. Of the silver the Dutch draw from Japan, a part sooner or later reaches India. And whatever comes directly by sea from Portugal or France *"seldom leaves the country, returns being made in merchandise."*

He is scrupulous enough to state the counter-case — India imports copper, spices, lead, broadcloth, and more than twenty-five thousand horses a year from Central Asia alone — and concludes that none of it comes close to balancing the flow inward.

That single observation reorganises this module. The Mughal extraction system was not a pipe running to a distant capital. It had two inputs — the land revenue taken from the cultivator, and the world's silver arriving in payment for Indian cloth — and

one output, which was consumption inside India by the people who had taken it. Nothing was remitted, because there was nowhere to remit it to.

And the two inputs were connected in a way that is easy to miss. The Mughal demand was assessed in cash. A peasant in Awadh could pay it only because there was silver in the countryside, and there was silver in the countryside because a weaver in Bengal had sold cloth to a merchant who had been paid in metal dug out of a mountain in Peru. The revenue system of the largest agrarian empire in the world was made payable by a monetary flow originating in the Andes.

The size of the take

The empire's own headline figure is the *jama*: the assessed revenue, computed from the *dastur* schedules, expressed in copper *dams*. Around 1595 it stood at something on the order of 3.6 *arab* — thousands of millions — of *dams*, which at the official reckoning of forty *dams* to the rupee is roughly ten crore rupees, a hundred million. Estimates for the realised revenue of the empire at its greatest extent a century later run to the region of two hundred and thirty million rupees, and a reconstruction of the take as a share of the subcontinent's total product usually lands somewhere between a sixth and a fifth.

Every one of those numbers should be handled with tongs. The *jama* is an assessment, not a receipt; the gap between *jama* and *hasil*, assessed and realised, is one of the standing facts of Mughal administration and is the subject of a large literature; the official forty-to-one ratio broke down as copper appreciated after Akbar's death, so conversions across reigns are unsafe; and any estimate of national product for the seventeenth century is a modern reconstruction with error bars wide enough to drive a caravan through. What can be said with confidence is the order of magnitude and the fact that this was, by a long way, the largest fiscal operation on earth.

But the interesting number in this module is not the total. It is the split.

The four-fifths

A late seventeenth-century Indo-Persian history, the *Mir'at-i Alam*, sets out the empire's land revenue and then breaks it down. The figures, as they reached English through Stanley Lane-Poole, are these: a total of 9,24,17,16,082 *dams*; of which the *khalisa*, the portion paid into the royal treasury, is 1,72,79,81,251; and the assignments of the *jagirdars* — the balance — 7,51,77,34,731.

The arithmetic does not quite close, as Lane-Poole notes, but the proportion is unmistakable. Something like four rupees in every five of the land revenue of the

Mughal empire never entered the imperial treasury at all. It was assigned in advance to a rank-holder, collected by that rank-holder's own agents in his own assigned district, in his own name, and spent by him. The emperor's own share was under a fifth.

This converges, from a different document a century later, with the figures the settlement module took from the *Ain* — that some eighty-two per cent of the empire's assessed revenue resources were absorbed by the rank-holders around 1595. Two independent accountings, a hundred years apart, agree on the ratio. It is the single most important number in Mughal fiscal history and it is almost never the one quoted.

Three consequences follow, and they run through everything else.

The first is that the emperor's fiscal state was very much smaller than his empire. The apparatus that could actually be directed from the centre — paid for out of the *khalisa* — was a fifth of the notional whole. Everything else was decentralised at the moment of assessment, before a single coin moved.

The second is that the extraction apparatus was not a revenue bureaucracy collecting into a centre. It was several thousand men, each collecting his own salary, in his own tract, remitting nothing. There was a bureaucracy — the *diwan*'s establishment, the provincial *diwans*, the *amalguzars*, the *qanungos* with their custody of local revenue custom — but a great deal of its work was recording and checking what other men had taken for themselves.

The third is the audit problem, which is the fiscal shadow of the branding regulation in Module 2. The empire could verify what a *jagirdar* was *assessed*. It could not readily verify what he had actually collected. An assignee whose district yielded more than the *jama* had every reason to say nothing; one whose district yielded less had every reason to say so loudly. The whole later history of *jama* and *hasil* — of paper claims exceeding what the ground would bear — is an audit failure written into the design.

The medium, and what it forced

The demand was in silver, and this was new.

The landscape found a countryside where cash barely reached: Ibrahim Lodi's edict that his nobles take nothing but corn in payment of rent, *"and no money was to be taken from the cultivators on any account,"* with gold and silver *"only procurable with the greatest difficulty."* A century later, Tavernier reports that every village in India had at least one money-changer.

The transformation was done by the assessment itself. The *zabt* fixed a sum in rupees against a measured area, and a peasant who owed rupees and possessed grain has only one available action: sell. He sells at harvest, when everyone else is selling and the

price is at its floor, to whoever is buying — the grain merchant, the *bania*, the moneylender who advanced him seed in the spring. So the monetisation of the demand inserted a second extraction ahead of the first. A share of the crop was taken by the market before the state's share was taken at all, and that share was taken by men whose names appear in no revenue register.

It should be said in the same breath that the effect was not only predatory. Habib's argument that the cash nexus stimulated town-based crafts is well founded: a countryside compelled to sell is a countryside generating marketable surplus, and the surplus fed a manufacturing economy that clothed a large part of the world. The Mughal peasant was squeezed into the market, and the market he was squeezed into was one of the most productive on earth. Both halves of that sentence are true and the module does not need to choose between them.

The men who moved it

Now the layer this module exists to surface, because it is invisible in the administrative literature and indispensable to the machine.

Consider the physical problem. A rank-holder is posted to the Deccan with a contingent to pay. His assignment is in Awadh. The revenue of that assignment is collected in rupees by his agent in a district a thousand miles from where he is standing. Carting silver that distance through country where the roads are not always safe is slow, expensive and sometimes impossible. The Mughal solution was not an imperial one. It was the *hundi*.

The *sarrafs* — money-changers, assayers, bankers — were present at every level from the village upward. They tested and valued coin, which in a currency of many mints and vintages was a skilled trade; they lent, at rates in the range of one to two and a half per cent a month; they insured cargoes inland and by sea; and they issued bills of exchange payable at distant places, so that value moved on paper while the coin stayed put. By about 1660 something like three hundred of them had acquired rights at the mints.

The state used this network rather than replacing it. Port officials at Surat were instructed to accept *sarrafs' hundis* in rupees drawn on Agra or on the imperial camp — which is to say that the empire took its own customs revenue in the form of privately issued paper. And when Aurangzeb's government attempted to strip the Surat *sarrafs* of their privileges, the bankers used the leverage they had: they moved to stop the Persian caravans docking at Surat and to close the mint. The special arrangement survived, and outlived the emperor.

Set that beside what the settlement module found. Module 2 concluded that the terms of a grant track the replaceability of the holder — thin terms for the service noble who could be replaced from Isfahan, hereditary possession for the Rajput chief who could not be replaced at all, and registration rather than grant for the *zamindar* who was already doing the work. The bankers are a fourth case, and a self-inflicted one. The empire's greatest administrative achievement, the uniform cash assessment, created a function that had not previously existed at scale — the long-distance movement of taxed value — and handed it to a class of men who were not imperial servants, held no rank, owed no service, and could not be dismissed. By monetising its demand the Mughal state manufactured its own third irremovable intermediary.

The apparatus was also, at every level, caste-specialised. Accountancy and record-keeping ran through Kayastha and Khatri families, who as Module 4 showed had gone into Persian and taken it over. Banking and long-distance finance ran through *bania*, Marwari, Jain and Khatri houses. Local revenue custom was in the custody of *qanungos*, hereditary and often of particular local lineages. The Mughal extraction machine was religiously mixed to a degree that surprises people who expect otherwise, and it was caste-sorted almost completely — not by imperial policy but because the empire recruited into functions that were already hereditary trades, and thereby made them more so.

The mint as a magnet

The imperial mint was open. Anyone could bring bullion or old coin and have it struck into imperial money for a fee, and the mints were deliberately sited in the big towns and the ports so that arriving metal could be converted with the least friction. Seigniorage was real revenue but never large — a few per cent of imperial income at most.

The Ain's own account of why the mint matters is characteristically brisk: *"As the successful working of the mint increases the treasure, and is the source of despatch for every department."*

Read the arrangement functionally and it is not primarily a revenue device at all. Free coinage plus mints at the ports is a machine for capturing a trade surplus. The world wanted Indian cloth and paid in metal; the metal landed at Surat and in Bengal; and the mint stood at the dockside to convert it, at a small charge, into the units in which the land revenue was assessed. Every ingot that came ashore became, within a few days, part of the money supply against which the *zabt* demand could be discharged. The empire's monetary policy was the mechanism by which the world's demand for Indian manufactures was turned into the Mughal tax base.

The other takings

Land revenue was the overwhelming bulk of it — the non-land taxes together have been put at something like a tenth of the state's income. The remainder is worth listing because of the pattern it makes.

Customs at the ports were levied at rates that were, by contemporary standards, modest, which is consistent with a state that wanted the ships to keep coming. Inland transit dues — *rahdari* — were formally prohibited more than once and levied continuously; the Ain's own instruction to the collector to waive perquisites on *"travelling passports"* is the prohibition and the evidence of the practice in the same clause. Autonomous chiefs paid *peshkash*, tribute, which is the same relation Babur recorded running the other way in 1528 when eight or nine *krurs* of his fifty-two went out to *rais* and *rajas* "obedient from of old." The estates of dead nobles were taken to settle their accounts. Conquered treasuries — Golconda's above all — came in as windfalls. And the *jizya*, reimposed in 1679, produced revenue, though its yield is disputed and the weight of recent opinion is that it was not principally a fiscal measure; it belongs with the robe rather than here.

What was done with it

Almost all of it was spent, inside India, on the maintenance of the men who had taken it and the things they wanted.

The largest single item was military: horses, retainers, elephants, arms, the contingents on which a rank-holder's *sawar* obligation was reckoned. And here is the one genuine outflow in the whole system, and it is not trivial — India could not breed cavalry mounts of the required quality, and Bernier's figure of more than twenty-five thousand horses a year from Central Asia, with more from Persia by way of Qandahar and more again by sea, represents a permanent haemorrhage of silver northwards in exchange for animals that died. If one is looking for the Mughal equivalent of a colonial remittance, it is the horse trade.

Then the households: the retinues, the tents, the kitchens, the *karkhanas* — the imperial and noble workshops that produced textiles, arms, jewellery and furnishing directly rather than buying them. Then the building, on a scale that still defines the landscape of northern India: Fatehpur Sikri, the Agra fort, the Taj Mahal, Shahjahanabad and its Red Fort, the Badshahi mosque at Lahore. The costs of these are variously reported and none of the figures can be verified. And then the hoards, because a system in which nobles could accumulate nothing heritable and emperors

could accumulate everything produced treasure on a scale that made the sack of Delhi worth a Persian invasion in 1739.

The structural point is the one Bernier arrived at from the other end. An extraction system whose product is consumed by the extractors, in the country where it was taken, is a redistribution rather than a drain. It transferred an enormous share of the agrarian surplus from the cultivator to a military service class of a few thousand families — that much is not in question and should not be softened — but it then spent that surplus on the products of Indian artisans, in Indian cities, employing Indian labour. The great urban manufacturing economy of Mughal India, and India's extraordinary share of world manufacturing output in this period, are in part a by-product of the consumption habits of the men who had taken the revenue. The peasant was not made poor so that a distant country could be made rich. He was made poor so that Agra and Lahore and Ahmedabad could be made magnificent.

Reading Mughal extraction against the framework

Three refinements.

First: the direction of extraction is a variable, and what sets it is whether the extracting class has anywhere to go home to. The framework, built substantially on colonial material, has treated outward flow as close to definitional — the point of the exercise being to move value from the periphery to the centre. This case shows that the outward flow is not a property of conquest but of *absentee* conquest. The Mughal service elite emigrated permanently, married locally, was buried locally and spent locally; Babur's begs wanted to go back to Kabul and were told there was nothing there. So the same rate of extraction produced an entirely different downstream effect: not a hollowed-out periphery but a swollen urban artisan economy attached to a military aristocracy's consumption, and a country that absorbed the world's silver instead of surrendering it. **Where the extracting class has no metropole, extraction is internal redistribution, and its visible signature is not impoverishment of the whole but a spectacular concentration of consumption within it.**

Second: the share the centre never touches is the most important number in a fiscal system, and it is almost never the headline. Four rupees in five of the Mughal land revenue were alienated at assessment and never reached the treasury. That one ratio accounts for the audit problem, the *jama–hasil* divergence, the necessity of rotating assignments, the impossibility of verifying what was actually taken from any given district, and the fact that the emperor's directable resources were a fraction of his empire's assessed wealth. **A study of any extractive order should establish the**

assignment share before the total, because the total measures the burden on the ruled and the assignment share measures the coherence of the state.

Third, and this is the contribution that builds on Module 2: monetising a demand creates a new class of irreplaceable intermediaries, and a state that does so has enlarged the problem it was trying to solve. The Mughal settlement was designed so that nothing could harden into a claim against the throne — revocable rank, rotated assignment, estate reclaimed at death. It conceded hereditary possession only where the holder genuinely could not be replaced. Then it assessed its revenue in silver, and in doing so brought into existence a function nobody had performed at scale before: moving taxed value across a subcontinent. That function went to men who held no rank, owed no service, and could not be dismissed — and within a century the imperial government was accepting its own customs revenue in privately issued bills and losing a straight confrontation with the bankers at Surat. **The instruments a state adopts to make its extraction efficient will generate new specialisms, and every new specialism is a candidate for irremovability.** The Mughals solved the problem of the landed aristocracy and, in the same reform that solved it, created the financier.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Bernier are from the public-domain Constable revision of Irving Brock's translation of *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668* (1891): the passage on gold and silver coming at length to be swallowed up in Hindustan; the trace of the routes through Turkey, Persia, Mocha, Basra and Bandar Abbas and the Japanese silver drawn by the Dutch; the observation that metal brought directly from Portugal or France seldom leaves the country; and the counter-list of Indian imports including more than twenty-five thousand horses a year from Central Asia. Bernier's spellings are his own; he is an interested witness whose commercial observation is generally better than his constitutional theory, and the bullion argument was independently reached by other contemporaries.

The exact quotations from the *Ain-i-Akbari* are from Blochmann's public-domain translation of Volume I (1873) for the imperial mint, and Jarrett's of Volumes II–III (1891–94) for the collector's instruction to waive perquisites on travelling passports. The quotations from the *Tarikh-i Daudi* on the Lodi rent-in-corn edict and the scarcity of coin are from Elliot and Dowson, Volume IV (1872), as in the landscape, with the cautions given there. The *Mir'at-i Alam* revenue breakdown — total 9,24,17,16,082 *dams*, *khalisa* 1,72,79,81,251, *jagir* assignments 7,51,77,34,731 — is quoted from Stanley Lane-Poole's *Aurangzib* (1893), a public-domain work whose own gloss on the figures (that a sixth to a fifth accrued as surplus after the cost of administration) is his inference and is distinguished here from the raw split; the

attribution of the *Mir'at-i Alam* is itself uncertain between Bakhtawar Khan and Muhammad Baqa.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: Shireen Moosvi on the *jama*, on the silver influx, and on the share of non-land taxes; Irfan Habib on the system of bills of exchange, on the cash nexus and its stimulus to town crafts, and on the agrarian system generally; M. Athar Ali and A. Jan Qaisar on the concentration of revenue claims; John F. Richards and Najaf Haider on money, mints and the *sarrafs*; and the literature on Mughal seigniorage and coinage standards. Tavernier's remark that every village had a money-changer is reported at second hand from that literature rather than quoted.

Contested figures are given as ranges or with their provenance stated. The *jama* of around 3.6 *arab dams* for 1595 converts to roughly ten crore rupees only at the official ratio of forty *dams* to the rupee, which had ceased to hold by the mid-seventeenth century as copper appreciated; conversions across reigns are therefore unsafe and are avoided. Realised revenue for the empire at its height in the region of two hundred and thirty million rupees, and the take as a sixth to a fifth of subcontinental product, are modern reconstructions with wide margins. Seigniorage at a few per cent of imperial income, non-land taxes at around a tenth, and the count of some three hundred *sarrafs* holding mint rights by 1660 all rest on single scholarly estimates. Construction costs for the great buildings are not verifiable and no figure is given here. Every load-bearing fact is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

Laid Before the Emperor, and Approved by Him

Information and suppression — an empire that recorded everything and let the subject of the record correct it; a court historian murdered by the next emperor, who wrote down why; and the histories that had to be written in secret because they could not be written at all

The diary

The twenty-third regulation of the second book of the *Ain-i-Akbari* describes an office called the *waqi'a-navis*, the recorder of events, and it opens with a sentence of characteristic flatness: *"Keeping records is an excellent thing for a government; it is even necessary for every rank of society."*

Fourteen clerks were appointed, described as zealous, experienced and impartial, of whom two did duty each day in rotation so that a given man's turn came round every fortnight, with a reserve of supernumeraries to cover absences. And then the Ain sets out what they were to write down, and the list is worth reading in full because nothing quite like it exists in the European archives of the period.

They recorded the emperor's orders and doings, and whatever the heads of departments reported; *"what His Majesty eats and drinks; when he sleeps, and when he rises; the etiquette in the State hall; the time His Majesty spends in the Harem; when he goes to the general and private assemblies; the nature of hunting-parties; the slaying of animals; when he marches, and when he halts; the acts of His Majesty as the spiritual guide of the nation; vows made to him; his remarks; what books he has read out to him; what alms he bestows; what presents he makes; the daily and monthly [fasts] which he imposes on himself; appointments to mansabs; contingents of troops; salaries; jagirs;"* rent-free grants, increases and decreases of taxes, contracts, sales, money transfers, tribute receipts, the issue of orders, the papers the emperor signed, the arrival of reports and the minutes on them, the arrivals and departures of courtiers, the inspection of the guards, *"battles, victories, and peace; obituaries of well-known persons; animal-fights and the bettings on them; the dying of horses; capital punishments; pardons granted by His Majesty; the proceedings of the general assemblies; marriages, births;"* the polo and the chess and the card games, extraordinary phenomena, and *"the harvests of the year; the reports on events."*

An empire that writes down the bets placed on its animal fights is an empire that has decided, as a matter of policy, that nothing is too small to enter the record.

And then the sentence that this module is named for:

"After the diary has been corrected by one of His Majesty's servants, it is laid before the emperor, and approved by him."

What follows is a document-control procedure of some sophistication. The approved entry is copied and signed by the clerk and handed to whoever needs it as a voucher, countersigned by three further officers, and in that state is called a *yad-dasht*, a memorandum. Copyists then make an abridgement of the memorandum, sign it, and return the abridgement in place of the original, whereupon it is signed and sealed by four more officers and becomes a *ta'liqa*. The *ta'liqa* is then sealed by the ministers of state.

Abu'l Fazl states the purpose without embarrassment: *"His Majesty's object is, that every duty be properly performed; that there be no undue increase, or decrease in any department; that dishonest people be removed, and trustworthy people be held in esteem; and that active servants may work without fear, and negligent and forgetful men be held in check."*

That is an audit system, and by seventeenth-century standards an outstanding one. It is also the empire's historical record. The two are the same artefact — and the subject of the record signs it off before it is filed.

The network

The recording did not stop at the palace. There was a *waqi'a-navis* in every province, and provincial governors sometimes held the reporting post themselves, which is a design flaw the sources notice without comment.

Below that, the revenue administration carried its own reporting obligation, and the terms are exact. The Ain instructs the district collector to arrange for the periodic appointment of one of the men best acquainted with the district *"to reside at the royal court and furnish it with the minutest particulars,"* and then requires of him a monthly return: *"a statement of the condition of the people, of the jagirdars, the neighbouring residents, the submission of the rebellious, the market prices, the current rents of tenements, the state of the destitute poor, of artificers and all other contingencies."*

Read that list as a specification of what the empire wanted to know. Prices. Rents. Who is in rebellion and who has submitted. The state of the destitute poor. The condition of the *jagirdars* — that is, the empire required its revenue officers to report on the conduct of the assignment-holders they worked beside. This is a government

that understood, in the abstract, exactly what information it needed to govern, and demanded it monthly, in writing, from every district.

It was also not a monopoly. Blochmann's note on Abd al-Rahim Khan-i-Khanan, one of the greatest nobles of Akbar's and Jahangir's reigns, records that he *"used to get daily reports from his newswriters whom he had posted at various stations. He read their reports at night, and tore them up."* A commander with a rank of five thousand ran his own intelligence service across the empire and destroyed the paper nightly. The emperor's network was the largest of several, not the only one.

The manufactured archive

The official history was built with the same deliberateness. The *Akbarnama* was written by imperial command, during the reign it describes, by a man with access to the state records — and, more than that, with an archive assembled for the purpose. Surviving veterans of the dynasty's earlier decades were instructed to write down what they remembered; Akbar's aunt Gulbadan Begum composed her memoir of Humayun because she was asked to. The raw material of the official history was commissioned into existence.

Set against that the book described in Module 3: Badauni's *Muntakhab*, covering the same reign, the same debates, the same emperor, written by a man who attended the *Ibadat Khana* and translated the *Mahabharata* under duress, and kept in a drawer until both he and Akbar were dead.

Two histories of one reign. One commissioned, resourced, archived and published; the other written at night by a man who could not afford to be found out. That is the shape of the Mughal information order, and it is not a metaphor.

The confession

And then the passage that makes this module unusual among the studies in this collection, because it is a suppression recorded by its author in the official record of his own reign, without any apparent sense that it required concealment.

Jahangir, in the first year of his reign, is explaining a promotion. Bir Singh Deo Bundela has been advanced to a rank of three thousand, and the emperor sets out why:

"The reason for his advancement and for the regard shown to him was that near the end of my revered father's time, Shaikh Abu-l-fazl, who excelled the Shaikhzadas of Hindustan in wisdom and learning, had adorned himself outwardly with the jewel of sincerity, and sold it to my father at a heavy price. He had been summoned from the Deccan, and, since his feelings towards me were not honest, he both publicly and privately

spoke against me... It became necessary to prevent him from coming to Court. As Bir Singh Deo's country was exactly on his route and he was then a rebel, I sent him a message that if he would stop that sedition-monger and kill him he would receive every kindness from me. By God's grace, when Shaikh Abu-l-fazl was passing through Bir Singh Deo's country, the Raja blocked his road, and after a little contest scattered his men and killed him. He sent his head to me in Allahabad."

Four things sit in that passage, and each of them belongs in this module.

The first is the framing. This is not a confession; it is a personnel note. The murder of the empire's official historian appears as the explanatory clause of a promotion, filed between other promotions, in a memoir the emperor intended to be read.

The second is the judgment. *He had adorned himself outwardly with the jewel of sincerity, and sold it to my father at a heavy price.* That is Akbar's son, in the imperial record, saying that the man who wrote the reign's official theology had been selling a performance of sincerity to the emperor at a good rate. Module 3 read Abu'l Fazl's account of royalty as a light communicated directly by God and asked whose belief it was cut for. Here is the heir's assessment of the tailor, in the family's own papers.

The third is the motive, which is not what one would expect. Jahangir does not say the histories were dangerous. He says *it became necessary to prevent him from coming to Court.* The threat was not the writing. It was access — a man who would reach Akbar and speak to him at a moment when the emperor's feelings toward his son were already embittered. What had to be stopped was a journey.

The fourth is that it worked, and was rewarded, and was written down.

What suppression looked like

The Mughal state suppressed people rather than texts, and the pattern holds across the century.

Guru Arjan, in Module 4, was executed after a political gesture, his property confiscated and his family handed to a noble; the teaching went on. Dara Shukoh was executed in 1659, and Khafi Khan records the legal form: the order was given for him to be put to death *"under a legal opinion of the lawyers, because he had apostatized from the law, had vilified religion, and had allied himself with heresy and infidelity."* A war of succession between four brothers was processed, at its conclusion, as a heresy proceeding — which is precisely the manoeuvre Module 3 identified in the *mahzar*, running the other way: where Akbar used the ulama's own instruments to take their veto, Aurangzeb used the same instruments to give a dynastic killing a lawful shape.

The public did not believe it. Khafi Khan records that when Malik Jiwan, the Afghan chief who had betrayed Dara to his pursuers, rode through the bazaars of Delhi

to receive his title, the crowds gathered, pelted him with dirt and filth and stones, killed several of his companions, and threw ashes and worse from the rooftops; that *"the disturbance on this day was so great that it bordered on rebellion"*; and that afterwards the *kotwal* investigated, identified a guardsman named Haibat as having taken a leading part, and had him *"condemned by a legal decision"* and executed.

Note what the empire did and did not do. It did not deny that the city had rioted over the betrayal of Dara Shukoh; the fact went into the record and has come down to us. It hanged one man. Suppression here is not the management of a narrative — the narrative was left standing. It is the identification of a ringleader.

The emperor who stopped his own history

The most consequential act of suppression in the whole two centuries was performed by an emperor against himself.

Aurangzeb, following the practice of his house, commissioned an official history and Muhammad Kazim wrote it. It covers the first ten years of the reign, to 1668, and then it stops, because the emperor forbade its continuation. The stated reason, reported by a later chronicler, was piety — that the recording of worldly glory was a frivolity beside religious study. Contemporaries and modern historians have proposed others: the desire to bury the war of succession, the execution of Dara and Murad and the imprisonment of Shah Jahan; the cost; simple temperament. The motive is not recoverable. The consequence is that the last forty years of the longest and most consequential reign in Mughal history have no official record.

What exists instead was written round the prohibition. Khafi Khan — whose real subject is Aurangzeb, and who is the fullest source we have — appears, on the account given in the very volume that translates him, to have composed the first half of his work before he *"was compelled to stop by Aurangzeb's orders,"* and, being determined to bring the history down to his own time, *"he continued his labours in secret."* The tradition holds that he was later ennobled with the title Khafi Khan, *khafi* meaning concealed, on account of the concealment of the book — though Elliot argued that Khwafi is simply a place-name from a district of Khurasan and that the romantic etymology is a misreading. Either way, the historian of Aurangzeb's reign is remembered by a name that means hidden.

His own preface states the problem in a sentence: *"The attempt to write an epitome of the fifty years' reign of this illustrious monarch is like trying to measure the waters of the sea in a pitcher; the affairs of the last forty years in particular are a boundless ocean, which authors have shrunk from committing to the thread of narrative."*

And his method, forced on him by the absence of an archive, is set out with a care that would not disgrace a modern historian: he will narrate what he has heard from men advanced in years, *"which he has fully verified by inquiries from men in office and from the writers of official despatches, and by the evidence of his own eyes."* Oral testimony, cross-checked against officials and against the *waqi'a-navis* despatches, plus autopsy. He apologises in advance for discrepancies between the earlier and later parts of his work, observing that even trustworthy books contain them, because accounts of the same occurrence vary.

That is what an empire's memory looks like when the empire has decided not to keep one.

The gap the record documents against itself

The single most useful passage in Khafi Khan, for the purposes of this collection, concerns a reform.

Early in the reign, with grain dear after two years of army movements and poor rains, Aurangzeb remitted the *rahdari* — the tolls collected on every highway, frontier and ferry, which Khafi Khan says brought in a large sum — together with the *pandari*, a ground and stall cess paid by every tradesman from the butcher and potter and greengrocer up to the draper, jeweller and banker. Beyond those, a long list of further imposts was abolished: cesses on fairs and festivals, on ferries, on gambling houses and brothels, on the tax farmers' collections, and a levy of a quarter of debts recovered by magistrates on behalf of creditors — *"nearly eighty in number, which brought in krors of rupees to the public treasury,"* all abolished throughout Hindustan. The remissions were proclaimed everywhere by mace-bearers and soldiers, with stringent orders.

Then Khafi Khan describes what happened.

"But although his gracious and beneficent Majesty remitted these taxes, and issued strict orders prohibiting their collection, the avaricious propensities of men prevailed... the royal prohibition had no effect, and faujdars and zamindars in whole places did not withhold their hands from these exactions." When reports of infractions reached the government, the offenders were punished by reduction of rank and by the despatch of mace-bearers to their districts. And then: *"The mace-bearers forbad the collection of the imposts for a few days, and then retired. After a while, the offenders, through their patrons or the management of their agents, got their mansab restored to its original amount. So the regulation for the abolition of most of the imposts had no effect."*

His summary of where it ended: *"By degrees matters have come to such a pass, that between the time of leaving the factory or port and reaching their destination, goods and merchandize pay double their cost price in tolls."*

Every element of a functioning information system is present in that account and the outcome is total failure. The emperor's intention was genuine — he gave up crores. The proclamation was public and reached the districts. The reports of infraction came back up the chain, exactly as the Ain's monthly returns were designed to make them. The sanction existed and was applied: rank reduced, an enforcement officer despatched. And the practice resumed within days of the officer's departure, and the rank was restored through patronage, and the tolls doubled the cost of goods.

This is the Mughal seam, and it is not the colonial one. There is no ocean here and no metropole being deceived. The gap runs between the decree at the centre and the practice in the district, and its width is measured in the number of days a prohibition survives after the man with the mace goes home.

The same passage contains one further detail that belongs to Module 4. When Aurangzeb replaced the solar Ilahi reckoning with the Arab lunar year and abolished the *nauroz*, Khafi Khan notes the objection that was put to him and overruled: mathematicians, astronomers and historians know that the seasons, the ripening of the crops, the harvests, *"the tankhwah of the jagirs and the money of the mansabdars, are all dependent upon the solar reckoning, and cannot be regulated by the lunar; still his religious Majesty was unwilling that the nauroz and the year and months of the Magi should give their names to the anniversary of his accession."* The emperor was told that the change would break the alignment between revenue collection and harvest, which was the whole reason the reform had been made in 1584, and he did it anyway. The calendar module found that an era imposed by decree forms nobody; here is the other half — an emperor who dismantled the working half of the same instrument for the sake of the symbolic half, having been warned.

Reading Mughal information against the framework

Three refinements.

First: where an order's audit apparatus and its historical record are the same document, the apex can see everything below it and nothing about itself. The *waqi'a-navis* system was superb at what Abu'l Fazl said it was for — keeping departments honest, exposing the dishonest, holding the negligent in check. Every one of those functions points downward. And the same diary, corrected by a servant and then *"laid before the emperor, and approved by him,"* was the empire's memory of its own reign. An audit that the audited signs off is a control system for subordinates and a mirror for the man at the top. This is a general proposition and it is testable elsewhere: **the more completely an order's record-keeping is fused with its chain of**

command, the better its intelligence about its parts and the worse its intelligence about its head.

Second: in an order without printing, the unit of suppression is the carrier and the moment, not the text. Nothing in Badauni was secret in the sense of being unknown — the debates were public, the emperor's acts were witnessed by hundreds. What was dangerous was a particular person reaching a particular audience at a particular time. Abu'l Fazl was killed not for what he had written but to stop him arriving at court and speaking to Akbar. Badauni's book was lethal while he lived and harmless once he and his subject were dead. Khafi Khan wrote in secret under Aurangzeb and was reportedly ennobled for the same work under a later emperor. Haibat the guardsman was executed for leading a crowd, not for holding an opinion. **Suppression in a manuscript order is interdiction of transmission rather than destruction of content** — which explains both why so many of these hostile histories survive and why not one of them changed anything at the time.

Third, and this is the contribution: an order's real reach is measured by the interval between the withdrawal of the enforcer and the resumption of the practice. The *rahdari* case supplies the whole apparatus and the whole failure in one paragraph. Sincere intention at the apex, public proclamation, functioning upward reporting, real sanction — and a few days of compliance. Not because the emperor was deceived: the reports reached the government, and Khafi Khan says so. Not because the information system failed: it worked exactly as designed. The failure was in the last yard, where the only instrument available was a man who could not stay, in a system where the offender's patron could get his rank restored. **Edicts measure intention; the decay interval measures power.** Any study of an order's control over its own agents should look for a moment when a prohibition was issued, enforced, and then quietly abandoned, and count the days — because that number, and not the volume of the archive, is what the apex actually commanded.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from the *Ain-i-Akbari* are from H. Blochmann's public-domain translation of Volume I (1873): the regulations regarding the *waqi'a-navis*, including the fourteen clerks and their rotation, the full list of matters recorded, the correction and approval of the diary by the emperor, the *yad-dasht* and *ta'liqa* procedure, and Abu'l Fazl's statement of the object of the system; and Blochmann's editorial note on Abd al-Rahim Khan-i-Khanan's newswriters and his destruction of their reports. The collector's monthly return and the resident informant at court are from H. S. Jarrett's translation of Volumes II–III (1891–94). Blochmann's transliterations have been silently normalised where the scanned text is corrupt and one bracketed gloss ("fasts") is his.

The exact quotation from Jahangir is from Alexander Rogers's translation, edited by Henry Beveridge, of the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (1909; Project Gutenberg text): the account of Bir Singh Deo's promotion and the killing of Abu'l Fazl, including the jewel of sincerity sold at a heavy price, the necessity of preventing him from coming to Court, and the despatch of his head to Allahabad.

The exact quotations from Khafi Khan's *Muntakhabu-l Lubab* are from John Dowson's translation in H. M. Elliot and John Dowson, *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*, Volume VII (1877), consulted in the 1952 Susil Gupta reprint of that translation: the author's preface on measuring the sea in a pitcher and on his method of verification; the execution of Dara Shukoh under a legal opinion; the riot against Malik Jiwan and the execution of the guardsman Haibat; the remission of the *rahdari*, *pandari* and the further imposts, the mace-bearers who forbade collection for a few days and then retired, the restoration of rank through patrons, and the doubling of the cost price of goods in tolls; and the objection to the abolition of the solar reckoning. The editorial statement that Khafi Khan was compelled to stop by Aurangzeb's orders and continued in secret, and Elliot's dispute over whether *Khafi* means "concealed" or derives from Khwaf in Khurasan, are Dowson's and Elliot's own, in the same public-domain volume. Elliot and Dowson's translations are abridged and were made with a stated colonial purpose, and the caution given in the landscape applies here; Khafi Khan himself wrote decades after many of the events, is generally regarded as the most careful of the Aurangzeb-era historians, and is nonetheless a partisan of the dynasty he served.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited: the standard accounts of the *Alamgirnama* and its termination in the tenth regnal year, and of the sources for the remainder of the reign; and the literature on the *akhbarat* and provincial reporting. The motive for Aurangzeb's prohibition of official history is disputed between piety, embarrassment and cost, and no view is adopted here. The tradition that Gulbadan Begum's memoir was written at Akbar's request is standard but rests on the text's own framing. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 8

I Too Stand Behind Him?

Elite coordination and the default — how an empire made Turks, Persians, Afghans, Rajputs and Indian Muslims defend an arrangement none of them had chosen, by making each man's own position depend on it; and what happened when men with standing and means stopped being paid by it

The problem the founder inherited twice

The landscape of this study established that the two orders meeting at Panipat in 1526 were dying of the same disease, and it is worth restating it here because everything in this module is an answer to it.

The Timurid world Babur was born into treated sovereignty as belonging to the ruling house collectively and distributed the realm among its males as appanages. It therefore manufactured, by rule, a fresh set of legitimate rival principals with armed followings in every generation, and it subdivided itself into irrelevance in four. The Lodi sultanate he destroyed had made the sultan the first among the heads of Afghan clans — a man who sat on a carpet, would not let his nobles stand, distributed everything he received among his troops, and told them that if they thought him unworthy they should choose somebody else. When Ibrahim tried to convert those peers into servants, they went and fetched a foreign king.

One arrangement had promised too much to kin, the other too much to peers. Both broke at the same joint. And the question the Mughals had to answer was not how to be obeyed — obedience is cheap when you have artillery — but how to build a hierarchy out of Central Asian Turks, Persians, Afghans, Indian Muslims and Rajput chiefs who despised one another, in which each of them would hold the arrangement up without being asked to, because holding it up was the only way to hold up himself.

That is what this collection means by the default: not loyalty, not consent, not belief, but an architecture in which every member with standing defends the whole thing as a by-product of defending his own place in it.

The default, assembled

The Mughal version had six components, and the modules before this one have established each of them separately. Set them side by side and the machine is visible.

Nothing at the top was heritable. Rank was awarded and lapsed at death; the assignment was rotated so that no man could root himself in a district; and the estate was taken at death to settle the holder's accounts with the crown. Bernier saw the consequence with complete clarity: the nobles of Hindustan *"cannot be proprietors of land, or enjoy an independent revenue, like the nobility of France,"* their income *"consists exclusively of pensions which the King grants or takes away according to his own will or pleasure,"* and when deprived of it *"they sink at once into utter insignificance, and find it impossible even to borrow the smallest sum."* A great noble's entire capital was a number in a register that one man could write and erase.

The number was comparative, and everybody could see it. This is the component most easily missed, and it is the one that does the real work. A *mansab* was not merely a salary; it was a place in a line. Every man at court knew his rank relative to every other man, and the arrangement of a *darbar* displayed it physically — who stood where, who was addressed, who was seated. Abu'l Fazl's official register of the grandees is precisely this: a list in descending order from ten thousand to two hundred, with names and numbers and almost nothing else. A positional good of that kind converts the entire elite into a single ranked queue in which the only route upward runs through the emperor's pen. It does not reduce competition among nobles; it channels it. Two Turani commanders who loathe each other compete *for* the emperor, and each of them has an interest in the queue continuing to exist.

The composition was engineered to prevent combination. Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Indian Muslims, Rajputs, and later Deccanis and Marathas, with Hindus running at a little over a fifth of the rank-holders across three reigns. No single group could form a majority; each had more to fear from the advancement of its rivals than from the emperor's demands; and every one of them needed the apex as arbiter. An elite of one ethnicity coordinates against the throne. An elite of five coordinates for it, one grievance at a time.

One exception was carved for the one group that could not be replaced. The Rajput chief entered on the same terms as everyone else — a rank, a *sawar* obligation, a contingent to produce at muster — and additionally received his ancestral country back as *watan jagir*, hereditary, guaranteed, never rotated. And the crucial feature of that concession, for this module, is not that it was generous but that it was *imperially warranted*. A Kachhwaha's possession of Amber, against cousins, collaterals and rival houses, rested on the emperor's confirmation. The exception did not put him outside the arrangement. It gave him the single strongest reason inside it.

The layer below was registered rather than displaced. The *Ain* records, tract by tract, the *zamindar*'s name, his caste, and his horse and foot. The empire did not

abolish that right; it recognised, taxed through, and thereby guaranteed it. A man whose hereditary claim against his own kin is written in the imperial manual has a stake in there continuing to be an imperial manual.

And the men who moved the money had the same stake. The *sarrafs* who issued the *hundis* by which revenue travelled from Awadh to an army in the Deccan made their living from the existence of an empire that assessed in silver and needed the silver moved.

Now state the principle plainly. Not one person in that list is loyal in any sense the word usually carries. The Turani commander is defending his rank, the Rajput his *watan*, the *zamindar* his registered right, the banker his commission, the *khanazad* his father's standing. Each is pursuing his own position, and because each position is constituted by the arrangement, the arrangement is defended continuously, by everybody, without anyone having to intend it.

The test, and it is a severe one

The proof that this worked is the year 1657, and Bernier — who was in the country for it — supplies the reading.

Shah Jahan fell ill; four sons went to war; the empire was without an effective head for two years. In a system of the kind the Lodis had run, or the Timurids, that is the moment when the great men take their assignments and become kings in them. It is what happened after Iltutmish, after Balban, after Alauddin Khalji, after Firuz Shah, and after Timur. It is exactly what did not happen in 1657.

The nobility did not fragment into warlords carving out territory. It went, in a body and by stages, to whichever prince looked likely to win — because, as Bernier observed at the time, the income of every one of them was a pension, and pensions are issued by whoever is on the throne. A man whose worth is a number in a register does not benefit from the register being destroyed. He benefits from being high in it, and there is going to be a register either way.

Read structurally, the war of succession did not threaten the arrangement at all. It selected a new issuer of ranks. The arrangement itself was never the stake, and no participant proposed to alter it. That is the strongest single demonstration of a working default anywhere in this collection: a four-way civil war fought by the entire military elite of a subcontinent, at the end of which the institutional structure was unchanged and the winner picked up the same pen.

Succession as the mechanism rather than the flaw

Which raises the question this module has to answer honestly, because the standard account gets it backwards.

The Mughals never adopted primogeniture and never established any rule of succession at all. The Turco-Mongol formula was *takht ya takhta* — the throne or the coffin — and every single transfer of power from Babur to Aurangzeb involved rebellion, war, or both. Nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians generally treated this as the dynasty's great structural defect.

Munis Faruqui's study of the Mughal princes makes the opposite case, and it belongs in this module because it is an argument about coordination. His account runs roughly as follows. Akbar, after the 1580s, stopped granting royal heirs semi-independent territories — closing off the Timurid appanage that had destroyed his ancestors — which meant that a prince who wanted the throne could no longer inherit a base and had to build one. He had to construct a household, recruit followers, cultivate allies across the whole imperial terrain, and accrue wealth and military strength wherever he was posted. All parties understood that only one prince could ascend and that the rest would die. The competition was therefore total, and it was conducted by going out into the empire and binding people to oneself.

The consequences make it a mechanism rather than a bug, and they are worth setting out in the framework's terms.

It forced every man of standing to commit. In an open succession there is no neutral ground: a noble who backed nobody was nobody afterwards. That is a costly, visible, irreversible declaration of allegiance, extracted from the entire elite, once a generation.

It pushed imperial networks outward. A prince recruiting for a war he would fight in fifteen years' time had to go where the men were — into provinces, into the households of regional chiefs, into groups the administration had not reached. The rivalry did the work of extension that no bureaucracy was doing.

It reconstituted rather than purged. The defeated princes died; their retinues, as a rule, did not. The followers of the losing side were spared and absorbed into the new dispensation, so that each war ended with a nobility that had been tested, reshuffled and rebound to a new apex — diverse, and freshly aware that its standing came from the throne.

And it delivered a proven winner. A man who had assembled a coalition capable of beating three brothers arrived in power with demonstrated competence and a following that had already paid to put him there.

So the Mughal answer to the problem that had killed every Delhi dynasty for three hundred and twenty years was not to solve the succession. It was to industrialise it — to

make the contest itself the process by which the elite was bound, tested and redistributed.

The cost should not be softened. Princes were killed by brothers. Aurangzeb imprisoned his father for eight years, executed Dara under a heresy ruling and Murad after a trick, and spent the rest of his long life unable to trust his own sons, one of whom he drove into rebellion and another of whom he imprisoned. Each transfer cost a year or two of civil war, and the treasure and lives that go with one. But the arrangement survived every round, and that is the fact that requires explaining.

The moment it stops paying: Agra, 12 May 1666

Now the fracture, and it begins with a scene that is usually told as a story about pride and is in fact a story about the mechanism.

Under the treaty of Purandar in 1665, Shivaji had come to terms with the empire; Mirza Raja Jai Singh of Amber, who had negotiated it, persuaded him to come north to the imperial court, partly to get him out of the Deccan. He arrived at Agra on 12 May 1666 with his young son, on the emperor's fiftieth lunar birthday, and was presented in the hall of private audience and directed to stand in the line of the rank-holders of five thousand. The emperor, on the account preserved in the sources, neither spoke to him nor addressed him. The business of the court went on, and he was left standing.

He asked who the man in front of him was, and was told: Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Jodhpur. His reaction has come down through both Persian and Marathi accounts: Jaswant, whose back his own soldiers had seen — *"I too stand behind him?"* He grew visibly angry, the emperor noticed the disturbance and sent Ram Singh to ask what ailed him, and he walked out of the *darbar*. He was placed under house arrest, and escaped in July; the traditional account has him carried out in baskets, which recent argument disputes without displacing the fact of the escape.

The temptation is to read this as an insult clumsily given and hot-headedly received. Read it instead against the machinery this module has been describing, and it is the coordination system failing in the exact place where it is load-bearing.

The *mansab* binds the elite because it is a comparative number, and a comparative number only binds if it is believed to be accurate. Its authority rests on the proposition that where you stand in the line corresponds to what you are. Shivaji had beaten forces under Jaswant Singh's command in the field. The line said Jaswant Singh was ahead of him. At that moment the instrument that coordinated the entire Mughal elite was telling a man with standing and means something about his own standing that he

knew, from direct experience, to be false — and once a positional good is seen to be misreported, it stops being a good at all.

And here is the structural trap, which is the sharpest thing in this module. The empire could not simply have fixed it by giving Shivaji a higher number, because the number is *positional*. Raising him means lowering Jaswant Singh. And Jaswant Singh's continued adherence to the arrangement depends on his own number being believed by him. The ledger is zero-sum: every honest admission of a new power is a demotion of an established one, and the established one is currently inside the tent.

Eight years later Shivaji had himself crowned at Raigad, with a Brahmin brought from Benares to certify the Kshatriya status that would make the coronation valid — building, as Module 4 noted, his own arrangement complete with its own robe. A man who cannot be ranked truthfully inside your hierarchy will construct one of his own in which he is at the top.

The exception revoked: Marwar, 1679

The second fracture broke the term that had held the Rajputs for a century, and it did so by applying a rule that was correct everywhere else.

Maharaja Jaswant Singh of Marwar — the same man — died at Jamrud in late 1678 while serving on the Afghan frontier, leaving no living son. Aurangzeb declared Jodhpur crown land and installed imperial officers, which is exactly what the settlement of Module 2 prescribed for a rank-holder who died: rank lapses, assignment reverts, accounts are settled. Then one of the widows, in Lahore, bore a posthumous son, Ajit Singh. The emperor proposed to divide Marwar between the infant and a rival Rathore claimant, and — on the accounts that have come down, which are Rajput as well as imperial — that the child be brought up in the imperial household as a Muslim.

The Jodhpur nobles under Durgadas Rathore refused, fought the detachment sent from Delhi to secure the child and the widows, and got them out; the infant was hidden in Marwar and then in the Aravallis. Rana Raj Singh of Mewar gave sanctuary, and the two greatest Rajput houses went to war with the empire — a war that ran, on and off, for the rest of the reign, and ended with the Rathores retaking Jodhpur within days of Aurangzeb's death in 1707.

The framework reading is unambiguous. The *watan jagir* was the load-bearing exception of the whole settlement: the empire's promise that this one category of holding was hereditary and would not be rotated, revoked or reclaimed. It was conceded precisely because the Rajput chief was the one participant who could not be replaced. When the empire treated a *watan* as an ordinary assignment lapsing to the crown, it did not merely offend a family. It withdrew the specific term on which an

entire group had been coordinating for a hundred years — and it did so by applying, consistently, a rule that was correct for every other kind of holder in the system.

That is the danger built into a settlement that runs on differentiated terms. The arrangement worked because different men held on different terms, calibrated to how hard each was to replace. Consistency, applied to it, is destruction.

And then the two mechanisms converged. Prince Akbar, sent against the Rajputs in 1681, changed sides, allied with the Rathores and Sisodias, and proclaimed himself emperor. For a moment in January of that year Aurangzeb, at Ajmer, was in real danger. He escaped it by forged correspondence that persuaded the Rajputs their prince was betraying them, and all but Durgadas left the camp; Akbar fled to the Deccan and eventually to Persia, where he died.

Note what nearly happened. Until 1681 the two great sources of instability had run on separate tracks: princely competition, which redistributed authority *within* the arrangement, and provincial defection, which took men out of it. Prince Akbar fused them. A claimant to the throne at the head of a seceding elite is not a succession war; it is the arrangement being contested from outside by someone entitled to contest it from inside.

The claims outrun the fund

The third fracture is the least dramatic and did the most damage, because it hit the default at its foundation: the position stopped paying.

Through the second half of Aurangzeb's reign the service elite expanded far faster than the revenue available to remunerate it. The conquests of Bijapur in 1686 and Golconda in 1687 brought whole Deccani and Maratha nobilities into the *mansabdari*, and the empire absorbed them because absorbing rivals was what the machine did — but each absorption added claims to a stock of assignable revenue that was, in many provinces, contracting, as peasant flight and *zamindar* militarisation and falling collections did their work. The number of rank-holders roughly doubled. Officers waited years without an assignment at all — the condition contemporaries called *be-jagiri* — and when an assignment finally came it yielded a fraction of its assessed *jama*.

The causes are actively disputed and this study does not settle them. Athar Ali and Satish Chandra located the crisis in the mismatch between an inflated nobility and a static revenue base; Richards argued that revenue from the Deccan annexations roughly kept pace and that the shortage of assignable land was a deliberate policy, Aurangzeb holding the best districts in *khalisa* to fund continuous campaigning;

Habib traced it to an agrarian crisis beneath both. More recent work has questioned the scale of the thing altogether.

What matters here is the effect on the default, and it does not depend on which causal account is right. The whole arrangement rested on the proposition that defending your position pays, because your position is a claim on real revenue issued by an apex that can make it good. When the rank is real and the revenue behind it is imaginary, that proposition inverts. A man holding a rank of five thousand and no *jagir* has all of the standing and none of the benefit — and the same self-interest that made him a pillar of the arrangement now makes him look for a patron who can actually deliver. A prince. A provincial governor with a going concern. A Maratha chief taking a quarter of the revenue in return for not burning the district.

That is what the successor states of the eighteenth century were. Not rebels against the Mughal order but Mughal officers who kept every form of it — the titles, the *farmans*, the emperor's name in the *khutba* and on the coin — and stopped remitting. Awadh, Bengal, Hyderabad. The arrangement was not overthrown. It was hollowed out by men doing precisely what it had trained them to do: defend their own position.

After 1707, the pen changes hands

The last stage can be stated briefly, since it belongs to the module on collapse.

Aurangzeb died in 1707 and his sons fought; the winner reigned five years; there was another war in 1712 and another in 1713. And then the mechanism inverted completely. Between 1713 and 1720 the Sayyid brothers, holding the effective military power at court, made and unmade emperors — installing Farrukh Siyar, then blinding and killing him in 1719, then running through two more in a matter of months.

The queue still existed. The ranks were still issued. But they were being issued by whoever controlled the men who could take the palace, and an emperor who cannot make a *mansab* mean anything is a man whose signature is the only thing anyone wants from him. The default had not been abolished; it had been captured. Everyone was still defending his own position, and defending your own position now meant controlling the pen rather than petitioning it.

Reading Mughal elite coordination against the framework

Three refinements, and the second is the one this study will carry forward.

First: a default is strongest when the elite's status good is issued solely by the apex, worthless outside the arrangement, and positional. The Mughal *mansab* met all three conditions, and the third is the one usually overlooked. Being non-heritable

and revocable made a noble dependent; being *comparative* made him competitive with his peers rather than with the throne. A man whose rank is a place in a visible line spends his ambition on the men beside him and his loyalty on the man who orders the line. This is why an elite assembled from five mutually hostile ethnicities was more governable than one would be, and why the war of 1657 was fought entirely inside the system: two men who hate each other will both defend an arrangement whose only currency is a number that one person issues. **Positional goods make rivals into each other's problem rather than the apex's**, and an order that can generate them cheaply has solved most of its coordination problem before it starts.

Second, and this is the contribution: a positional ledger has a fixed capacity, and cannot admit a genuinely new power without demoting an established one — so the same device that binds the existing elite makes it structurally impossible to bind a new one on honest terms. Shivaji at Agra is the clean case. He could not be ranked truthfully, because a truthful rank would have displaced men whose adherence depended on their own rank being believed; and he could not be ranked falsely, because he knew what he had done to the man standing in front of him. There was no number available that did not cost the empire something it could not afford. The Mughals met this limit three times in forty years and failed it three times: with the Marathas, whose rank was a lie; with the Rathores, whose exception was revoked in the name of consistency; and with their own inflated nobility, whose ranks became paper. **Any order coordinated by relative standing will eventually meet a rising power it can neither exclude nor honestly place, and that meeting is the beginning of its fracture.** The corollary, and it is a hard one: the more successful such an order is at growing, the sooner it arrives.

Third: an unregulated succession can serve as the coordination mechanism rather than the failure of one, but only while the losers can be reabsorbed. Following Faruqui, the Mughal open succession forced the entire elite into costly visible commitment once a generation, drove princes to build networks in regions the administration had not penetrated, and delivered a winner with a tested coalition and a re-declared nobility. The condition of the whole thing is reabsorption: the defeated prince dies, his followers are taken in, and what survives each round is the arrangement rather than the faction. The mechanism inverts the moment that condition fails — when a princely bid fuses with a provincial secession, as in 1681, so that the loser's followers have somewhere else to be; and finally after 1707, when there was no longer an apex solvent enough to reabsorb anybody, and the same competition that had once distributed imperial authority outward began distributing it away.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Bernier are from the public-domain Constable revision of Irving Brock's translation of *Travels in the Mogul Empire, A.D. 1656–1668* (1891): the passage on the Omrahs' inability to own land or borrow once their pensions are withdrawn. The characterisation of the *Ain-i-Akbari*'s register of grandees, the *zamindar* notices with their castes and forces, and the *watan* arrangement rest on Blochmann's and Jarrett's public-domain translations as cited in Modules 2 and 6.

Shivaji's outburst at the *darbar* of 12 May 1666 is quoted in five words and otherwise paraphrased; the scene as given here — the presentation by Asad Khan in the *Diwan-i-Khas*, the placement in the line of five-thousand rank-holders, the emperor's silence, the identification of Jaswant Singh, the anger and the walk-out, and Ram Singh's role — follows the reconstruction from Persian and Marathi sources in the tradition descending from Jadunath Sarkar, whose English wording is in copyright and is not reproduced. The escape of July 1666 is not in dispute; the traditional account of concealment in baskets has recently been questioned and is flagged rather than asserted.

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited throughout: Munis D. Faruqui, *The Princes of the Mughal Empire, 1504–1719* (2012), for the argument that unregulated succession and princely household-building extended rather than eroded imperial power, that Akbar's discontinuation of appanages after the 1580s forced princes to build followings across the empire, and that the retinues of defeated princes were normally reabsorbed; M. Athar Ali and Satish Chandra on the expansion of the nobility and factional politics, against John F. Richards on *be-jagiri* as a consequence of deliberate *khalisa* policy in the Deccan, and Irfan Habib on the agrarian basis — a dispute that is reported and not resolved here, and whose scale has itself been questioned in recent work. The composition figures for the nobility and the proportion of Hindu rank-holders are as given in Module 2, on tabulations that differ in base and cut-off.

The Marwar sequence — Jaswant Singh's death at Jamrud in late 1678, the declaration of Jodhpur as crown land, the birth of Ajit Singh, the proposal to divide Marwar between Ajit Singh and Inder Singh Rathore, the rescue of the child by Durgadas Rathore and the Jodhpur nobles, the sanctuary given by Rana Raj Singh, and the war lasting to 1707 — rests on the standard accounts, in which Rajput chronicle tradition and imperial sources diverge on several particulars, notably the proposal that the infant be raised as a Muslim, which is reported in the Rajput material and is given here as reported rather than established. Prince Akbar's defection and proclamation in January 1681, and Aurangzeb's use of forged correspondence to break the alliance, are likewise standard and rest on partisan sources on both sides. The dating

of Jaswant Singh's death is given as 1678 in most modern accounts and as 1679 in some older ones. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 9

Come to This Chain and Shake It

Plurality or foreclosure — whether anything in this empire protected a subject against its apparatus; what the accession charters promised and how long they lasted; and the one durable protection, which nobody granted and nobody won

The most famous liberty in Mughal history

Jahangir opens the record of his reign with it, as the first act of his rule:

"After my accession, the first order that I gave was for the fastening up of the Chain of Justice, so that if those engaged in the administration of justice should delay or practise hypocrisy in the matter of those seeking justice, the oppressed might come to this chain and shake it so that its noise might attract attention. Its fashion was this: I ordered them to make a chain of pure gold, 30 gaz in length and containing 60 bells. Its weight was 4 Indian maunds, equal to 42 'Iraqi maunds. One end of it they made fast to the battlements of the Shah Burj of the fort at Agra and the other to a stone post fixed on the bank of the river."

It is a wonderful object and it has done four hundred years of service as the emblem of Mughal justice. So it is worth being precise about what it is.

It is a device for bypassing the judicial hierarchy and reaching the sovereign directly, and it is addressed at a specific failure: officials who *delay or practise hypocrisy*. It creates no entitlement, specifies no procedure, sets no standard, names no remedy and binds nobody. It cannot be invoked against the emperor, only against his servants, and it works only if the emperor is at Agra, awake, and inclined to send someone down to the riverbank. The remedy it offers is the sovereign's attention.

That is not nothing. In an empire where, as Bernier observed, a wronged peasant or a ruined artisan could not possibly meet the cost of a journey of two hundred leagues to seek justice at the capital, a mechanism that shortcuts the chain of officials is a real improvement for whoever can reach the wall. But a protection and an appeal are different objects, and this module has to keep them apart from the first page. **An appeal runs to the apex against its officers. A protection runs against the apex.** The chain is the most elaborate appeal device in this collection and it is not a protection at all.

The accession charter

Immediately after the chain, Jahangir sets out twelve orders *"to be observed as rules of conduct (dasturu-l-'amal) in all my dominions,"* and this is a more serious document.

They forbid the levy of *tamgha* and river tolls *"and other burdens which the jagirdars of every province and district had imposed for their own profit."* They require jagirdars to build rest-houses, mosques and wells on dangerous stretches of road. They provide that *"the bales of merchants should not be opened on the roads without informing them and obtaining their leave."* They provide that *"if anyone, whether unbeliever or Musalman, should die, his property and effects should be left for his heirs, and no one should interfere with them,"* with intestate estates to be held under guardians and spent on public works. They forbid taking possession of any person's house. They forbid the cutting off of noses and ears, the emperor adding that he had made a vow by the throne of God that he would not blemish anyone in that way. They order that *"the officials of the Crown lands and the jagirdars should not forcibly take the ryots' lands and cultivate them on their own account."* They require hospitals in the great cities at the charge of the *khalisa*.

Read as a list of protections that is a substantial charter, and it is worth naming the beneficiaries because the framework's question is always who got what. Merchants are protected against officers on the roads, twice. Heirs of the dead are protected against confiscation, explicitly regardless of religion. Householders are protected against seizure. Everybody's nose and ears are protected. And the cultivator is protected against the assignment-holder taking his land into direct cultivation.

Two of the twelve, however, are not what they appear.

The ninth is not a liberty at all. *"A government collector or a jagirdar should not without permission intermarry with the people of the pargana in which he might be"* — that is the anti-rooting rule of Module 2, the same logic as the rotation of assignments, dressed as an ordinance. It protects the emperor from his officers becoming local.

And the fifth is the one that gives the whole document its measure. The emperor forbids the making and selling of wine and every intoxicating drug, and then adds, in the same breath: *"although I myself drink wine, and from the age of 18 years up till now, when I am 38, have persisted in it."* There follows a candid account of the quantities — twenty cups of double-distilled spirit at his worst, reduced over seven years from fifteen cups to five or six, latterly only at night, *"Now I drink only to digest my food."* A prohibition that exempts the man issuing it, announced in the same sentence, is not a law. It is an instruction to subordinates, and it tells you exactly what kind of document the other eleven are.

What the charter was actually for

The twelfth ordinance is the one that explains the other eleven, and it is not usually printed with them.

"I gave a general order that the offices and jagirs of my father's servants should remain as they were." Then: ranks increased by not less than twenty per cent and as much as three or four hundred; the subsistence money of the *ahadi* troopers raised by half; the pay of all domestics by a fifth; the allowances of the ladies of his father's harem by between a fifth and a doubling, according to their condition and relationship. And then the sentence that matters most for this module: *"By one stroke of the pen I confirmed the subsistence lands of the holders of aimas (charity lands) within the dominions, who form the army of prayer, according to the deeds in their possession."* Prisoners long confined were released. New coinage was struck.

Now put the document back in its moment. A new emperor at accession is at the weakest he will ever be. His brothers or sons have claims; his father's nobility must consent to be his; the *khutba* must be read in his name in mosques he does not control; and in Jahangir's particular case his own eldest son would rebel within months. What he issues at that moment is a settlement, and its terms are calibrated with precision to the constituencies capable of withholding: ranks and assignments confirmed and inflated for the nobility, pay raised for the soldiery and the household, allowances raised for the women of the palace, and revenue-free holdings confirmed for the men Jahangir calls, in a phrase worth keeping, *the army of prayer*.

So the framework's prediction about where concessions come from is confirmed exactly. The charter is produced by a bargaining moment inside the hierarchy, and the protections for merchants and cultivators ride along in the same instrument as the pay rise for the *ahadis*. The interesting question is not where it came from. It is whether any of it stuck.

The diagnostic of repetition

It did not, and the proof is that the same prohibitions keep being issued.

Follow one tax. In 1527, before Khanwa, Babur remitted the *tamgha* on Muslims throughout his territories, noting that its yield *"was more than the dreams of avarice"* — and, in his private memoir, that the whole package of pious acts *"worked admirably."* In 1605 Jahangir's first ordinance forbids the levy of *tamgha* and river tolls and the other burdens the jagirdars had imposed for their own profit. Around 1659 Aurangzeb abolished the *rahdari* — the tolls on every highway, frontier and ferry — together with

the *pandari* and, on Khafi Khan's count, some eighty other imposts *"which brought in krors of rupees to the public treasury,"* proclaimed everywhere by mace-bearers.

And Khafi Khan records the outcome, quoted in Module 7 and worth repeating here because this is where it does its work. The prohibition had no effect; *faujdars* and *zamindars* did not withhold their hands; when reports of infraction reached the government, offenders were punished by loss of rank and by the despatch of mace-bearers — and *"the mace-bearers forbad the collection of the imposts for a few days, and then retired. After a while, the offenders, through their patrons or the management of their agents, got their mansab restored to its original amount."* His summary of the end state: goods pay *"double their cost price in tolls"* between the port and their destination.

Three emperors abolished the same tax over a hundred and thirty years. That is the whole finding. **A right that has to be granted again at every accession is not a right; it is a favour, and its repetition is the evidence that it never took.**

The fourth ordinance fails the same test and more starkly. Property to the heirs, no interference, unbeliever or Muslim alike — and fifty years later Bernier reports as a settled feature of the constitution that *"the Great Mogol constitutes himself heir of all the Omrahs, or lords, and likewise of the Mansebdars, or inferior lords, who are in his pay."* Either the ordinance never extended to the service class, in which case the protection stopped precisely where wealth began, or it was simply disregarded. Neither reading leaves a right standing.

What did accrete

And yet something did accumulate, and the honest finding of this module is that it came from a direction the framework's usual expectation does not point at. It was not won in a factional fight and it was not granted from above. It was a documentary practice, and it grew in the courts of the *qazis*.

The recent scholarship here is Nandini Chatterjee's, and the concept she offers is *permissive inclusion*. The imperially appointed *qazi*'s court, in non-criminal matters, allowed and attracted but did not require all Mughal subjects, of whatever religion, to bring their business there. Non-Muslims used it in large numbers, by choice, for property disputes, sales, inheritance and the settlement of quarrels — not because Islamic law had been imposed on them but because of what the court produced.

What it produced was a document. The characteristic instrument is the *mahzar-nama*: a testimony in the first person, drafted to a standard form by scribes who were predominantly not Muslims, endorsed in writing by members of the local community and by the writer's professional and social contacts, and notarised with the seal of the *qazi*. Consider the composition of that object. A collective attestation by one's

neighbours, produced by a professional scribal caste, given legal force by a state officer. Farhat Hasan's studies of property litigation at urban *qazi*s' courts show the same thing from the other end: property documents that carried social meaning far beyond their economic content, transactions socially regulated, families and caste groups whose honour was bound up in the paper.

And Chatterjee's central demonstration is the durability. A family of landlords in Malwa can be followed through a reconstructed archive of Persian, Hindi and Marathi documents from the sixteenth century to the twentieth — through the Mughal empire, the Marathas, a princely state, and British colonial rule. The paper outlived three sovereignties. Successive regimes found it cheaper to read the documents and confirm what they said than to reopen every claim in the countryside.

Jahangir himself supplies the mechanism in his own ordinance: he confirmed the charity lands *"according to the deeds in their possession."* The emperor did not investigate; he read the paper.

That is residue in the framework's sense, and it should be described precisely. It is not a liberty. Nobody had a right to a favourable judgment, and the *qazi* was an imperial appointee. What accreted was a *practice* — the habit, on the subject's side, of writing claims down and having them attested and sealed, and the corresponding habit, on the state's side, of honouring paper it had not itself issued. That practice cost the empire nothing to permit and would have cost a great deal to abolish, which is why it survived when the ordinances did not.

It links directly to Module 2. Zamindari right was heritable, divisible, saleable, mortgageable and litigated, and the empire registered rather than granted it. The registration is the point. A right the state has written down in its own manual, and which its own courts will adjudicate, is defensible in a way that a right merely possessed is not.

Speech, assembly, petition

On the other axes the answers are thinner, and one of them is genuinely surprising.

Speech. There was no protection whatever, and Module 7 established why it mattered less than one would think: in a manuscript order, suppression targets carriers rather than texts. Badauni wrote a savagely hostile history of Akbar's reign and hid it until both he and Akbar were dead. Khafi Khan was forbidden to continue his history and continued it in secret. Both books survive; neither changed anything at the time. What could not be done was to reach an audience while the subject was alive — which is why Abu'l Fazl was killed on the road rather than in his study.

Assembly. Here the finding is unexpected, and it is Abhishek Kaicker's. The Friday congregational prayer was religiously obligatory, and the emperor observed it too, which meant it could not be forbidden. In the great mosque of Shahjahanabad it assembled a very large number of the city's people every week, in a setting where the sermon named the sovereign and where the naming could be interrupted, contested or answered. Kaicker's argument is that the second half of the seventeenth century, without anyone intending it, produced in Delhi something like a public — that Shah Jahan, by building a capital around a fort and a great congregational mosque, created a potential public as a by-product of urban design, and that the language of Islam furnished ordinary people with a vocabulary in which claims about what was right and true could be made against those in power. His case studies run from popular protest around the regicide of Farrukh Siyar to the shoemakers' riot of 1729, which he reads as showing both the reach of popular action and its limits.

This collection has already seen one instance in the primary record. When Malik Jiwan, who had betrayed Dara Shukoh to his pursuers, rode through the bazaars of Delhi in 1659 to collect his reward, the crowds pelted him with dirt and filth and stones, killed several of his companions, and rained ashes and ordure from the rooftops; Khafi Khan records that *"the disturbance on this day was so great that it bordered on rebellion,"* and that afterwards the *kotwal* investigated, identified a guardsman named Haibat as a ringleader, and had him condemned and executed.

That is the shape of assembly in this order. It happened, it was formidable, it was recorded rather than denied, and it cost one identified man his life. It was not a right and nobody claimed it was. But it existed, it could not be legislated away, and it was a by-product of a religious obligation and a piece of city planning rather than a concession anybody had extracted.

Petition. The *arzdasht* went up the administrative chain; the *jharokha* appearance at the window presented the emperor daily to whoever gathered below; the chain hung at Agra. All three are appeals. None creates an entitlement, and the *Ain*'s instruction that the collector should sit *"where every one may have easy access to him without the intervention of a mediator"* stands against Bernier's question about how a poor peasant is to fund a journey of two hundred leagues to be heard.

The lever that was destroyed

And now the other side of the ledger, which this study is obliged to state because it runs against the sympathetic reading of the empire's most attractive reign.

Before 1579 there existed in Mughal India an institution with an independent body of law, its own trained personnel, its own criteria of validity, and the standing to declare

a sovereign's act unlawful. The proof that the *ulama*'s veto was real is that it was used: in 1580–81, when Bengal and Bihar rose, a *qazi* issued an opinion that rebellion against Akbar was lawful, and the rising had to be put down by force.

The *mahzar* of 1579 removed that veto — permanently, in the *ulama*'s own vocabulary, on their own proof-texts, with their own signatures at the foot. From that point the emperor could adopt whichever of the jurists' conflicting opinions he judged beneficial, and his decree bound everyone; opposition carried damnation in the next world and loss of property and religious privileges in this one.

The framework's judgment has to hold two things at once here, and it should not flinch from either. That act removed the only institutional check in the empire capable of telling an emperor no in a language he could not simply overrule — and it is the same act that produced *sulh-i kul*, the abolition of the pilgrim tax and the *jizya*, the translation bureau, and a century in which Hindus held better than a fifth of the imperial ranks. **A check and a liberty are not the same thing, and this order bought a great deal of the second by destroying the first.** The substantive toleration was real and the structural foreclosure was real, and they were the same manoeuvre. Which is also why the toleration could be reversed in a decade by a successor using the identical machinery: what one emperor could grant without asking anybody, another could withdraw without asking anybody.

Set the two halves of this module side by side and the trajectory is legible. On the axis of protection against the apparatus, the Mughal order ran net-foreclosing from 1579 onward. What survived at the end of the seventeenth century was not the chain and not the twelve ordinances but a scribal habit, a weekly congregation, and a bundle of sealed deeds in a Malwa family's box.

Reading Mughal liberty against the framework

Three refinements.

First: distinguish the appeal apparatus from protection, and treat an elaborate appeal apparatus with suspicion. The chain of justice, the *jharokha*, the *arzdasht*, the collector sitting without a mediator, the emperor personally hearing petitions — the Mughal order was rich in devices for carrying a grievance upward and had almost nothing that ran the other way. Every one of those devices depends on the apex's attention, disposition and continued existence, and none of them can be invoked against him. **A gold chain thirty yards long is what an order builds when it has no institution capable of restraining its own officers by right** — and the very magnificence of the device is a measure of the gap it is filling. An order with functioning protections does not need to hang bells from the battlements.

Second: repetition is the diagnostic, and the test of residue is whether the successor has to grant it again. The *tamgha* was remitted by Babur in 1527, forbidden by Jahangir in 1605 and abolished with eighty other imposts by Aurangzeb around 1659, and Khafi Khan tells us it was being collected within days of each proclamation and at double the cost price of goods by the end. Ordinance four guaranteed the estates of the dead and Bernier found the emperor taking them fifty years later. **Where a protection must be re-issued at every accession, nothing has accreted; where the new sovereign merely confirms what the paper says, something has.** Jahangir supplies both cases in the same document — the ordinances, which dissolved, and the charity lands confirmed *"according to the deeds in their possession,"* which did not.

Third, and this is the contribution: where the hierarchy is too dependent to bargain, residue accretes not from concession but from documentation. The framework's expectation is that liberties originate in factional fights, when a group with standing and means extracts a protection as the price of continued participation. The Mughal case very largely fails that expectation, and Module 2 explains why: a nobility that holds nothing heritable, whose rank lapses at death and whose estate is reclaimed, has nothing to bargain with. Bernier's observation is the whole of it — deprived of the pension, they sink at once into utter insignificance. The one group that did extract a genuine protection, the Rajputs with their *watan*, extracted it because they were irreplaceable, and it was revoked in 1679 the moment an emperor applied the general rule to it.

What accreted instead came from below and sideways: a documentary practice, sustained by a professional scribal caste that was largely not Muslim, in courts that permitted rather than compelled attendance, producing sealed and communally attested paper that successive sovereigns found cheaper to honour than to re-adjudicate. **Where no faction is strong enough to win a right, the durable substitute is a record that the next regime finds cheaper to accept than to reopen.** It confers no entitlement, protects nobody in principle, and cannot be invoked against a determined sovereign — and it outlasted the Mughals, the Marathas and the British, which is more than can be said for the chain of pure gold with sixty bells that hung on the wall at Agra.

A note on sources. The exact quotations from Jahangir are from Alexander Rogers's translation, edited by Henry Beveridge, of the *Tuzuk-i-Jahangiri* (1909; Project Gutenberg text): the Chain of Justice with its dimensions, weight and attachment points and the purpose stated for it; the twelve ordinances in full, including the prohibition of *tamgha* and river tolls, the merchants' bales, the property of the dead

whether unbeliever or Musalman, the seizure of houses, the cutting off of noses and ears, the ryots' lands, the rule against local intermarriage by collectors and jagirdars, the hospitals, and the wine prohibition with the emperor's account of his own drinking; and the twelfth ordinance with the confirmation of offices and jagirs, the increases to ranks, *ahadi* subsistence, domestics' pay and harem allowances, and the confirmation of the *aima* holders — "the army of prayer" — according to the deeds in their possession. Rogers's transliterations and bracketed glosses are his.

The exact quotations from Bernier are from the public-domain Constable revision of Brock's translation (1891), as cited in Modules 2 and 5; from Khafi Khan, from Dowson's translation in Elliot and Dowson, Volume VII (1877), as cited in Module 7, with the cautions given there; from Babur, from Beveridge's translation (1921–22), as cited in Module 1; and from the *Ain-i-Akbari*, from Jarrett's translation of Volumes II–III (1891–94).

Modern scholarship is paraphrased and credited, and none of it is quoted: Nandini Chatterjee, *Negotiating Mughal Law* (2020) and her article on *mahzar-namas* (2016), for the concept of permissive inclusion, the composition and use of the *mahzar-nama*, the predominantly non-Muslim scribal milieu, and the Malwa landlord family whose documents survive across three sovereignties; Farhat Hasan on property litigation and dispute at urban *qazis'* courts and on the social meanings of property documents; and Abhishek Kaicker, *The King and the People* (2020), for the argument that Shahjahanabad inadvertently produced a potential public, that religious practice and the Friday congregation furnished the space and the vocabulary for popular political action, and for the episodes of protest running to the shoemakers' riot of 1729. These are recent and in some respects revisionist arguments; they are reported as the current state of the scholarship rather than as settled fact, and the extent to which qazi-court practice in the surviving regional archives can be generalised across the empire is not established.

Contested points are flagged. The *fatwa* declaring rebellion against Akbar lawful in 1580–81 rests on the chronicle tradition. Whether Jahangir's fourth ordinance was ever understood to apply to the service nobility, or was simply disregarded, cannot be determined from the sources; both readings are given. The chain of justice is attested only in Jahangir's own memoir and in accounts derived from it, and no independent record of its use survives. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 10

Fourteen Thousand Four Hundred and Ninety-Nine

Change and collapse — an order that won every battle it fought and dissolved anyway; the four cracks, every one of them inside the hierarchy; and the peasants, weavers and outcastes who rose again and again, were crushed every time, and mattered nonetheless

The thing that has to be explained

In 1690 the Mughal empire was the largest and richest state on earth and had just finished absorbing the last independent powers of the Deccan: Bijapur in 1686, Golconda in 1687, and in 1689 the person of the Maratha king Sambhaji, taken at a secret refuge, brought before the emperor and executed. Its army had not been beaten in the field by any of its own subjects in living memory. Its revenue apparatus was the most sophisticated in the world. Its emperor was in the field in person, in his seventies, having conquered more territory than any of his predecessors.

Fifty years later, a Persian army destroyed the imperial army at Karnal in a few hours, occupied Delhi, massacred a large part of its population in a single day and carried the treasury, the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor back to Iran. Seventy-five years later, the revenue of the richest province in the empire was being collected by a London trading company — not by conquest of the throne, but under a grant from the emperor, in Mughal legal form, with his seal on it.

The question this module has to answer is what cracked, and who cracked it. And the framework's claim, stated in *Elite Chaos*, is uncomfortable and specific: structural change never comes from the rising of the ruled, because a functioning floor of force does not lose to its own population; it comes when the elite fractures, exhausts itself, is conquered by a rival elite, or overbreeds. This case has all four, and it also has a large number of risings from below, which makes it an unusually good place to test the claim.

The risings, and what happened to every one of them

Take the negative case first and take it at full strength, because the Mughal empire faced more popular insurrection than most orders in this collection and its record against them is perfect.

In 1669 the Jats of the Mathura country rose under Gokula, put something like twenty thousand men into the field, killed the local *faujdar*, sacked a cantonment and stopped the revenue collection. They were broken by Mughal artillery at Tilpat and Gokula was executed by dismemberment at Agra on the first day of 1670.

In 1672 the Satnamis rose at Narnaul — peasants, artisans and landless labourers of low and untouchable castes, gathered around a devotional sect, triggered by a foot soldier who struck a man with a stick over a field. They killed the soldier, beat back the first force sent against them, killed the *faujdar*, and marched toward Delhi with a reputation for invulnerability that the Mughal nobility appears half to have believed. A field army destroyed them.

In the mid-1680s the Jats rose again under Rajaram, better organised, using raiding rather than battle, and got as far as breaking into Akbar's tomb at Sikandra. Rajaram was killed.

And in the Punjab, after Guru Gobind Singh's death, Banda Singh Bahadur led a rising from 1709 that took towns, killed the governor of Sirhind and struck its own coin. He was besieged, captured, taken to Delhi and executed in 1716 along with hundreds of his followers.

Four risings in half a century, drawing on real and deep grievance, in some cases with tens of thousands of men. Four annihilations. The framework's proposition holds here without a single exception: **an intact floor of force does not lose to its own population.**

There is a further detail worth noticing before moving on. Not one of these risings was led by a peasant. Gokula was a *zamindar* of Tilpat — a hereditary intermediary of the layer Module 2 described, not a cultivator. The Satnamis were a formed religious body with its own institutions. Banda Bahadur was a commander operating within a formation that had spent a century building initiation, code and succession. Even at the very bottom, the leadership came from a level above.

The one that lasted, and why it was not a peasant rising

The Marathas are the apparent counter-example, and they are the exception that proves the rule so exactly that they should be described carefully.

Shivaji was not a peasant. His father Shahji was a Bijapur noble holding *jagirs*; Shivaji himself began as the manager of two *parganas* on his father's behalf, and Khafi Khan's account of his origins, hostile as it is, places the family firmly inside the military service class of the Deccan sultanates. What he built was not a jacquerie. It was a rival hierarchy, and it was built the way hierarchies are built: forts taken and garrisoned, a revenue system of its own in *chauth* and *sardeshmukhi*, a navy, a ministry, a nobility

with ranks, and — in 1674 — a coronation performed by a Brahmin brought from Benares to certify the Kshatriya status the genealogy would not supply, which is to say a robe, commissioned and paid for, of exactly the kind Module 3 examined.

That is *Elite Chaos*'s counter-elite with unusual precision: disappointed insiders of an existing hierarchy, mobilising the countryside as fuel for a war against incumbents, and constructing their own settlement as they go.

And the proof of what kind of thing it was lies in what happened when Aurangzeb killed its king. Sambhaji was taken in 1689 and executed, and the war continued for eighteen more years — under Rajaram, and after his death under his widow Tarabai. What the emperor had destroyed was a person. What he was fighting was an institution, and institutions replace persons. That is exactly what a peasant rising cannot do, and it is why the Jats at Tilpat ended with Gokula and the Marathas did not end with Sambhaji.

Crack one: too many heirs

The first crack is elite overproduction, and this case documents it with a set of numbers that would satisfy a modern quantitative historian.

The count of imperial rank-holders stands at something like 1,803 around 1595; about 3,243 in 1637; and about 14,499 by 1690. Roughly an eightfold increase in a century. The assessed revenue of the empire did not grow eightfold, and the *realised* revenue in many provinces was contracting, as peasant flight, *zamindar* militarisation and the cost of suppression did their work. The Deccan annexations made it worse rather than better: taking Bijapur and Golconda meant absorbing their nobilities, and taking Maratha commanders into service meant absorbing them too — every conquest added claimants faster than it added assignable revenue.

The result had a contemporary name. *Be-jagiri*: a rank-holder with no assignment. Officers waited years for a *jagir*, and when one came it yielded a fraction of its assessed *jama*. Aurangzeb's own decision to keep the most productive districts in *khalisa* to fund continuous campaigning shrank the reserve of assignable land further — which John Richards read as deliberate policy rather than systemic failure, against M. Athar Ali and Satish Chandra, who located the crisis in the mismatch between an inflated nobility and a static base, and Irfan Habib, who located it beneath both in an agrarian crisis. Recent work has questioned the scale of the whole thing. This study does not settle the dispute and does not need to.

What matters is the effect on the default described in Module 8. That arrangement held because every man with standing defended it as a by-product of defending his own position, and his position was a claim on real revenue that only the emperor could issue

and make good. When the rank is real and the revenue behind it is imaginary, the same self-interest that made a man a pillar makes him a solvent. A commander of five thousand with no *jagir* has all of the standing and none of the benefit, and he will look for someone who can actually pay — a prince, a governor with a going concern, a Maratha chief offering a share of what he collects.

It is worth pausing on the historiographical convergence. The Aligarh historians described this mechanism in detail from Persian administrative sources decades before Goldstone and Turchin gave elite overproduction a name and a model. They were not doing comparative sociology; they were reading *arzdashts*. The two literatures arrived at the same structure from opposite directions, which is the best kind of evidence that the structure is real.

Crack two: the war that could not be finished

The second crack is exhaustion, and it has a date and a place.

Aurangzeb left the north for the Deccan in 1681–82, at about sixty-three, prompted immediately by his son Akbar's rebellion in alliance with the Rajputs. He never came back. For roughly twenty-five years he governed the largest empire on earth from a succession of military camps, and he died in one near Ahmadnagar in March 1707, in his late eighties.

In that time he won everything and finished nothing. Bijapur fell in 1686, Golconda after an eight-month siege in 1687, Sambhaji was taken and executed in 1689 — and the war went on for another eighteen years, fort by fort, in country where a fort retaken by the Marathas in the spring had to be besieged again in the autumn. That is the operational definition of exhaustion: an apex that wins every engagement it fights and cannot bring the war to an end, while its fiscal machine is consumed at a rate the conquered territory cannot replace.

There is a second-order effect that this study has the tools to name precisely. Module 7 established that the empire's real reach was measurable as the interval between the withdrawal of an enforcer and the resumption of the practice, and Khafi Khan measured it at a few days. Now apply that to an emperor absent from the north for a quarter of a century. Every mechanism of correction in the Mughal system terminated in one man's personal attention — the diary corrected and approved by him, the mace-bearer despatched by him, the rank restored or withheld by him. Removing that man to a camp fifteen hundred kilometres away for twenty-five years did not decentralise the empire. It left the whole correction apparatus running with nothing at the end of it.

Crack three: the fracture that repudiated nothing

Aurangzeb died and his sons fought; the winner reigned five years; there was another war in 1712 and another in 1713. Then the mechanism of Module 8 inverted completely. Between 1713 and 1720 the Sayyid brothers, holding the effective military power at court, installed and removed emperors at will — putting Farrukh Siyar on the throne and then deposing, blinding and killing him in 1719, and running through two more in months. The queue of ranks still existed; the pen that wrote in it had changed hands.

And then the great officers walked away, and the *manner* of their walking away is the most important thing in this module.

Murshid Quli Khan made Bengal effectively autonomous from around 1717. Saadat Khan took Awadh in 1722 and made it hereditary. Nizam-ul-Mulk, who had been the empire's most formidable servant, left the court for the Deccan in 1724 and founded what became Hyderabad.

Not one of them repudiated the emperor. Not one declared independence. They accepted imperial appointments, took *farmans*, had the *khutba* read in the emperor's name in their mosques, struck coin in his name, sent the occasional token tribute, and kept the whole apparatus of Mughal form intact. What they stopped doing was remitting the revenue and obeying instructions.

That is fracture without repudiation, and it is precisely the shape the default of Module 8 predicts. Every one of those men held his standing in a currency the emperor alone could issue. To repudiate him would have been to destroy the value of one's own title. What they needed from Delhi was not money and not orders — it was legitimacy, and legitimacy was the one thing a bankrupt emperor could still supply without cost. So the robe outlived the floor, and the empire continued for another century as a legitimating brand, licensed by a sovereign with nothing behind it.

The diagnostic follows directly, and it is the reason this kind of collapse is so hard to see at the time. Nothing changed on the map. Nobody fought a war of secession. The provinces were still Mughal provinces, governed by Mughal officers with Mughal titles under Mughal law. **The evidence of a fracture like this is fiscal, not political: what has stopped is remittance, and remittance appears in no chronicle.**

Crack four: the rival hierarchies arrive

Into an apex in that condition came three outside powers in succession, and the framework's third crack — conquest by a rival elite — arrived in three quite different forms.

The Marathas came first and came as raiders and then as revenue claimants: Baji Rao at the outskirts of Delhi in 1737, Malwa and Gujarat detached, *chauth* levied across an expanding territory. They were themselves subsequently destroyed as a paramount power by a fourth outside hierarchy, Ahmad Shah Abdali's Afghans, at Panipat in 1761 — on the same field, for the third time in two and a half centuries.

Nadir Shah came second and came as a hammer. He met the Mughal army at Karnal on 24 February 1739 and destroyed it in a matter of hours, with mobile forces and camel-mounted swivel guns against a large, elephant-heavy, badly commanded host. The emperor surrendered and brought the conqueror to his own capital. Nadir entered Delhi on 20 March; after a rumour of his death set off street fighting, he ordered a general massacre on 22 March in which somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand people were killed in a few hours. He took the treasury, the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor, and the trans-Indus provinces were ceded. The indemnity figures in the sources vary so wildly — from tens of lakhs negotiated at Karnal to figures of fifteen or twenty-five crore for what was ultimately extracted — that only the order of magnitude can be trusted. The tradition that Saadat Khan and Nizam-ul-Mulk had themselves invited the invasion is repeated in most accounts and is not securely established; it is reported here as tradition.

And the third came quietly, in a form no one at the time recognised as conquest at all. The English East India Company beat the Nawab of Bengal at Plassey in 1757 and a combined force including the emperor himself at Buxar in 1764. And in August 1765, at Allahabad, the emperor Shah Alam II granted the Company the *diwani* — the right to collect and administer the revenue of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa — by imperial *farman*, in return for an annual payment.

Read that against Module 6 and the shape of the thing becomes visible. The Company did not depose the emperor; it had no need to. Four rupees in five of the Mughal land revenue had never reached the imperial treasury in the first place, because they were alienated to assignment-holders at the moment of assessment. What was worth having was not the throne but the *diwani* — the fiscal instrument itself — and the Company took it in the emperor's name, with his seal on the document, and became, in law, a Mughal revenue official. It collected in his name and paid him a pension.

An order whose extraction has already been alienated at assessment can be captured without being overthrown, because by the time anyone arrives to take the centre, there is nothing at the centre left to take.

What the risings actually did

Now the honest objection, which *Elite Chaos* insists on and this module has to meet.

To say that the Jats and the Satnamis and the Sikhs did not break the floor is not to say that their pressure was causally nothing. Set the four cracks beside the risings and the channel is visible, and it runs through the fisc.

Every rising had to be suppressed, and suppression cost field armies, campaigns and time. Every rising interrupted collection in the districts it touched. And beneath the risings ran the continuous, invisible pressure that Module 5 identified as the standing feature of the Indian countryside: the cultivator could walk, and did — into a town, into an army camp, into the territory of a chief offering better terms. That flight never appears as a battle and never enters a chronicle, and it shows up only as the widening gap between the assessed *jama* and the realised *hasil*, which is the same gap that made an officer's rank worthless and turned him toward a patron who could actually pay.

So the pressure from below is a real cause, operating on the arithmetic rather than on the floor. It raised the cost of the settlement continuously, shrank the fund out of which the elite had to be seated, and thereby fed the overproduction crisis that produced the fracture that invited the conquest. The weight on the lever was real. The lever was worked above.

And the counter-elite finding holds at every level. Gokula was a *zamindar*. Shivaji was a jagirdar's son. The Sikh formation was institutional before it was insurgent. Prince Akbar, in 1681, was the emperor's own son at the head of a seceding Rajput elite — elite fracture arming the discontented in the most literal form the framework describes. In no case did the base supply the leadership, the programme or the organisation, because those require exactly the formation that Module 4 showed the empire had never provided to anybody below the service class.

Reading the Mughal collapse against the framework

Three refinements.

First: the four cracks are not alternatives but a sequence, and overproduction sits upstream. *Elite Chaos* presents fracture, exhaustion, conquest and overproduction as four ways a floor can crack. This case shows them as stages of a single process with a clear direction of causation. The rank-holders multiplied roughly eightfold in a century while the fund did not; the war in the Deccan consumed the fisc for twenty-five years and could not be ended; the exhausted fisc could no longer seat the elite it had bred, so the elite fractured; and the fracture is what made the empire worth invading and cheap

to invade. **Where the numbers exist to test it, overproduction is the crack that opens the others** — and the striking thing about the Mughal case is that Persian-source historians in Aligarh described the mechanism in detail, from *arzdashts* and salary schedules, decades before comparative sociology named it.

Second, and this is the contribution: a settlement can fracture without anyone repudiating it, and that is the hardest form of collapse to detect. Awadh, Bengal and Hyderabad were founded between 1717 and 1724 by imperial officers who kept every form — titles, *farmans*, *khutba*, coinage — and stopped remitting. No declaration, no secession, no change to the map. The reason follows from the default of Module 8: **where the elite's status good is issued solely by the apex, the apex's legitimacy outlives its solvency, because the officers who have stopped obeying still require the one thing only he can issue.** A man whose standing is a Mughal title does not benefit from there being no Mughal. So the robe is preserved with great care by the very men who have hollowed out the floor beneath it, and an empire can persist for a century as a licensing authority for the authority it no longer has. The diagnostic for a researcher is therefore fiscal rather than political: **do not ask who has declared independence; ask who has stopped remitting**, and note that the second leaves almost no documentary trace precisely because everyone involved has an interest in the forms continuing.

Third: the terminal form of that condition is the transfer of the fiscal instrument by grant rather than by conquest. The *diwani* of 1765 is the cleanest example in this collection of an order changing hands without being overthrown. The Company took the right to collect the revenue of the richest province in India by *farman*, under the emperor's seal, and paid him for it — becoming a Mughal officer in law while being a rival hierarchy in fact. It could do this because Module 6 had already established the condition that made it possible: four-fifths of the empire's land revenue was alienated at the moment of assessment and never passed through the centre at all. **An extractive order that has decentralised its own extraction has also decentralised what a conqueror needs to seize** — and the last thing such an order loses is the throne, because by then the throne is the only thing left that nobody needs to take.

A note on sources. This module rests more heavily on modern scholarship than its predecessors, and none of it is quoted. The account of Aurangzeb's Deccan campaigns, the annexations of Bijapur (1686) and Golconda (1687), the capture and execution of Sambhaji (1689), the emperor's departure for the Deccan in 1681–82 and his death near Ahmadnagar in March 1707 follows the standard narrative in John F. Richards and the wider literature; the emperor's exact age at death is variously given and is stated

here only as his late eighties. The rank-holder series — approximately 1,803 for 1595, 3,243 for 1637 and 14,499 for 1690 — is the conventional one, rests on sources of differing quality for each date, and should be treated as indicating magnitude and direction rather than precision. The interpretation of the *jagirdari* crisis is actively disputed: M. Athar Ali and Satish Chandra on an inflated nobility against a static revenue base; John F. Richards on *be-jagiri* as a consequence of deliberate *khalisa* policy in the Deccan; Irfan Habib on an underlying agrarian crisis; and recent work questioning the scale of the phenomenon altogether. The dispute is reported and not resolved. The convergence with Jack Goldstone's and Peter Turchin's models of elite overproduction is this study's observation, not a claim made by the Aligarh historians themselves.

The risings are as given in Module 5, with the addition of Banda Singh Bahadur's rising from 1709 and his execution at Delhi in 1716, on the standard accounts. Khafi Khan's account of Shivaji's family origins is from Dowson's translation in Elliot and Dowson, Volume VII (1877), and is a hostile source used only for the family's position within the Bijapur service class, which is not in dispute.

For the successor states, the conventional dates are Murshid Quli Khan's effective autonomy in Bengal from around 1717, Saadat Khan's appointment to Awadh in 1722, and Nizam-ul-Mulk's departure for the Deccan in 1724; all three are processes rather than events and the dating is approximate. For Nadir Shah's invasion: Karnal on 24 February 1739, entry into Delhi on 20 March, the massacre of 22 March with mortality usually put between twenty and thirty thousand and not independently verifiable, and the removal of the treasury, the Peacock Throne and the Koh-i-Noor. The indemnity figures in the sources are mutually inconsistent — ranging from fifty lakhs negotiated at Karnal to fifteen or twenty-five crore for the final extraction — and no single figure is asserted. The tradition that Saadat Khan and Nizam-ul-Mulk invited the invasion is widely repeated, is not securely established, and is flagged as tradition. The grant of the *diwani* of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa to the East India Company by Shah Alam II in August 1765 is not in dispute; the annual payment and its subsequent history are not pursued here.

The framework used is Thomas J. Bryan's *Elite Chaos*, whose four cracks, counter-elite thesis and treatment of pressure from below as causal load rather than proximate agency are applied throughout, and whose own debts to Skocpol, Goldstone, Turchin, and Acemoglu and Robinson are credited there. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 11

The Mildness and the Equity of Our Rule

The grim accounting — what the sword cost across two centuries, whether the metabolic note was ever called, why the largest entry in the ledger falls after the arrangement ended, and why this conquest, alone among the conquests of India, was never allowed to be forgotten

Two ledgers and a question

An armed group took power in northern India in 1526, held it for roughly two centuries, and dissolved. This module totals what that cost, and the framework requires two separate accounts to be kept.

The first is the **sword ledger**: the direct violence — battles, sieges, massacres, executions, suppressions, enslavements — the deaths that a weapon caused because someone swung it.

The second is the **metabolic ledger**, and it is subtler. Intensive agriculture organised by a state can lift a population above the number the land would carry without that organisation: canals maintained, grain moved, seed advanced, order kept on the roads that carry food. A population raised on that scaffolding is a population living on credit. Disrupt the coordination — by conquest, revolution or collapse — and the note is called, and it is paid not in battle deaths but in famine and epidemic, in numbers that usually dwarf the sword. Whether this applies to any given order is an empirical question, not an assumption, and it turns entirely on what the apex was actually maintaining.

And behind both stands the question this collection always ends on: whether, after enough time, anyone still remembers that violence made the arrangement at all.

The sword: what can be counted and what cannot

Nothing like a total is possible, and any study that offers one is inventing. What can be established is the shape, and the shape is instructive.

The founding, 1526–1576. Panipat lasted half a day and Babur put the dead at fifteen or sixteen thousand, adding that he heard later in Agra from Hindustanis that forty or fifty thousand may have died — his own two figures, and neither is checkable. Khanwa in 1527 and the Ghaghra in 1529 were comparable field actions. At Chanderi in 1528 the garrison killed their own women and then each other, and Babur recorded that *"a pillar of pagan-heads was ordered set up on a hill north-west of Chandīrī."*

Chausa in 1539 and Kannauj in 1540 destroyed two Mughal armies. The second Panipat in 1556 destroyed a third army under Hemu.

Then the fort war. Chittor, from October 1567 to February 1568, ended with the *jauhar*, the death of the garrison, and the killing of non-combatants on the emperor's order after the fighting was over — conventionally put at thirty thousand, a figure resting entirely on Mughal chronicle authority and not independently verifiable, though the fact of a massacre of non-combatants is affirmed by every source, imperial and Rajput alike. Ranthambhore, Kalinjar, Gujarat, Bengal and Haldighati follow.

The successions. Four pitched battles between brothers in 1657–59 — Dharmat, Samugarh, Khajwa, Deorai — each fought by armies in the tens of thousands; then further wars in 1707, 1712 and 1713. Add the executions that closed them: Dara Shukoh under a heresy ruling, Murad after a trick, Khusrau's followers impaled along a road, a series of blinded and strangled emperors after 1713.

The suppressions. Gokula's Jats broken by artillery at Tilpat, and Gokula dismembered at Agra. The Satnamis destroyed at Narnaul. Rajaram's Jats. Banda Singh Bahadur executed at Delhi in 1716 with hundreds of his followers. Guru Arjan in 1606 and Guru Tegh Bahadur in 1675. Sambhaji in 1689.

The Deccan, 1681–1707. This is the largest single item in the sword ledger and the one that resists quantification entirely. Twenty-five years of continuous campaigning by an emperor who never went home, fought fort by fort across country that had to be retaken every season, with two sultanates besieged into extinction and a Maratha polity that could not be finished. Bhimsen, who served through it and wrote the *Nuskha-i Dilkusha*, is the eyewitness, and the official record does not exist because Aurangzeb forbade it.

The ending. Nadir Shah's troops killed somewhere between twenty and thirty thousand people in Delhi in a few hours on 22 March 1739. Panipat in 1761 destroyed a Maratha army and a great many camp followers with it.

And the slavery. Akbar prohibited the enslavement of prisoners of war in 1562, which tells us what had been standard. Campaigns in Sind sold captured populations. Bernier reports peasants unable to meet the revenue demand *"bereft of their children, who are carried away as slaves."*

The honest summary: the sword was concentrated at the founding, at every succession, at every rising, and above all in the final quarter-century in the Deccan. It ran into the hundreds of thousands at minimum and could plausibly be argued into the millions across two hundred years. It cannot be totalled, and the reason it cannot be totalled matters — the empire counted horses, elephants, *bighas*, *dams* and rank-holders with obsessive precision, and did not count the dead.

The metabolic ledger: does it apply?

Now test the second account, and the answer is unexpected and turns on findings the earlier modules established for other reasons.

The metabolic mechanism requires that the population be living on state-maintained coordination. Ask what the Mughal apex was actually maintaining that the harvest depended on, and the answer is: remarkably little.

The landscape found it first, in the conqueror's own hand. Babur, describing Hindustan before he had governed a single monsoon, noted that settlers *"need not dig water-courses or construct dams because their crops are all rain-grown,"* which is why a village could be depopulated and re-founded elsewhere in a day and a half. There was no hydraulic system whose failure would starve anybody, because the rain did the work and no state controlled the rain. Module 5 established the corollary: land was abundant relative to labour, and the cultivator's ability to walk away was the standing feature of the countryside.

Module 4 established the rest of it. The apparatus that actually organised Indian subsistence — the village, the *jati* allocation of hereditary occupation, the artisan paid in harvest shares, the *zamindar* who collected and the headman who apportioned — was not the empire's creation, was not maintained by the empire, and did not depend on the empire. The Mughals inherited it, taxed through it, and never touched it. So when the imperial apparatus dissolved in the eighteenth century, the machinery that fed India did not dissolve with it, because it had never been Mughal machinery.

And Module 5's wage evidence points the same way: an unskilled day-wage in 1595 bought something in the region of four kilogrammes of wheat in the Agra market, and real wages in northern India fell over the following two centuries rather than rising. A population at the top of its own long-run range is not a population out over a cliff.

So the framework's metabolic mechanism largely does not apply to the Mughal build-up. The empire did not lift India above its natural carrying capacity, because it was not doing the lifting. What it added — order on the roads, a reliable silver currency, credit through the *sarrafs*, a demand pegged to the harvest festivals — raised productivity and market integration without creating dependency. An order that inherits its subsistence system rather than building one carries almost no metabolic debt, and its fall does not call the note.

That said, the ledger is not empty, and two entries belong in it.

The first is the famine of 1630–32 in Gujarat and the Deccan: drought, then locusts, then excessive rain, then three consecutive crop failures. The mortality figures are observers' estimates — around three million in Gujarat in the ten months to October 1631, perhaps a million more around Ahmadnagar, and a Dutch report

putting the regional toll above seven million, which is very probably too high. What makes this partly a Mughal entry rather than purely a weather event is the amplifier: Shah Jahan's army was in the field at Burhanpur, consuming the region's supplies. And against it, the recorded imperial relief was soup kitchens and almshouses at Surat and Ahmedabad and an order to distribute five thousand rupees.

The second is the Deccan war years themselves, in which army movement, dearth and epidemic ran together across a quarter-century. No figure survives that this study is willing to state.

Both entries are the same kind of thing: **war-amplified weather events, not carrying-capacity debt.** The distinction matters, because it means the Mughal metabolic exposure was low and that its fall, in itself, should not have produced catastrophe.

The note called after the ending

And yet the largest single entry in this entire accounting falls after the arrangement had ended, and it belongs here because the framework's question is what the ending cost.

Bengal and Bihar suffered crop failure in autumn 1768 and again in summer 1769, accompanied by smallpox. The resulting famine of 1769–70 is conventionally said to have killed around ten million people, roughly a third of the population of the affected region, on the figures descending from Visaria and Visaria. It should be said at once that the range in the literature is enormous — estimates run from one million to ten — and that the higher figures are contemporary or near-contemporary reconstructions rather than counts. The scale is not securely established. That it was catastrophic is not in doubt.

The administrative circumstance is the thing this study can speak to, because Module 10 described it. The East India Company had held the *diwani* — the right to collect and administer the revenue — since 1765, granted by the emperor's *farman*, while civil administration, the *nizamat*, remained with the Mughal governor. So the revenue right and the responsibility for governing had been separated, and the party holding the revenue right was a joint-stock company answerable to shareholders. The demand was maintained through the failure and in places raised; Romesh Chunder Dutt's later estimate put the Company's demands at a very large share of agricultural output in cash terms. Grain was hoarded and traded. Relief was minimal.

The attribution is contested and this study does not resolve it: drought and smallpox were real and independent causes, and the more cautious modern accounts

stress the harvest failure rather than the policy. But the direction is agreed even in cautious accounts — the demand was not relaxed when the crop failed.

Two more entries follow in the same generation. The Chalisa famine of 1783–84 across northern India, in the middle of the post-Mughal wars, is put at around eleven million. The Doji bara or Skull famine of 1791–92 in the Deccan and the south is put at a similar figure. Both numbers are soft and both regions were at that moment governed by nobody in particular.

Set the two ledgers side by side and the arithmetic is the finding. Two centuries of Mughal rule produced a sword ledger that cannot be totalled but is plausibly in the high hundreds of thousands, and a metabolic ledger consisting of a handful of war-amplified famines. The thirty years after the arrangement ended produced famine mortality that the standard figures put in the tens of millions.

And the mechanism of that reversal is not the one the framework usually expects. The note was not called by the *absence* of coordination. It was called by the *installation of a different coordination with a different objective function*. The Mughal apparatus had remission machinery — weak, corrupt, and frequently ignored, but real, and written into the *Ain*: the collector instructed to assess crop loss on the spot and transmit it without delay so a remission might be approved or a commissioner sent, and to assist the needy husbandman with advances of money and recover them gradually. What replaced it in Bengal was a fixed cash demand, a revenue right divorced from the duty to govern, and a board in London.

Was the violence forgotten?

The framework's other standing question is whether, in time, the arrangement settled into being simply the way the world is, and everyone forgot that a sword made it.

For this order, the answer is no — emphatically, and almost uniquely.

Four hundred years after Panipat and three hundred after Chittor, the Mughal conquest is among the most actively contested political memories on earth. Temple destruction, the *jizya*, Aurangzeb's name, Shivaji's coronation, the sack of Chittor, the execution of the Sikh gurus: these are live material in Indian public life in the 2020s, argued in legislatures, courts and street politics. Nothing about this conquest has been naturalised. It has not become furniture.

The reason is not that the violence was worse than other conquests'. It is that naturalisation requires two things — enough time, and the absence of a successor with an interest in remembering — and India had a successor whose interest was very great indeed.

Which brings this study to an accounting of its own sources, and the honesty of the whole project requires that it be made plainly.

A very large part of the Mughal and Sultanate record accessible in English was assembled by Sir Henry Miers Elliot, a servant of the East India Company, and published after his death by John Dowson between 1867 and 1877 as *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians*. Elliot's preface states the purpose. He hoped the translations would show what Muslim rule in India had actually been, and thereby *"make our native subjects more sensible of the immense advantages accruing to them under the mildness and the equity of our rule."*

This study has used those volumes throughout. The Afghan constitution of Bahlul Lodi's carpet, the *masnad-i ʿali*, the offer to stand down; the Thanesar episode with its chief of the ulama and its unguarded line about the thousands of Muslims who would have been placed in easy circumstances; Ibrahim Lodi's rent-in-corn edict and the scarcity of coin; Khafi Khan on the *rahdari* and on the execution of Dara Shukoh and on the mace-bearers who forbade collection for a few days and then retired. Every one of those passages was selected, translated and printed by a project whose author had written down, in advance, what he wanted the selection to accomplish.

The passages are not forgeries and the scholarship since has not overturned most of them; the *Tarikh-i Daudi* really does say what Dowson has it saying. But a curated archive is a curated archive, and the atrocities that survive in the record are the ones a later regime found useful, while the ones nobody had a use for are simply gone. **The survival of an atrocity in the accessible record is itself a political fact**, and a grim accounting that does not say so is not a grim accounting; it is a downstream product of somebody else's.

And now the contrast that closes the recursion the project opened with.

The landscape of this study established, following B. D. Chattopadhyaya, that the Rajput houses whose defence of their ancestral honour furnishes so much of the emotional charge of this history were themselves the product of an earlier build — that Kshatriya status in the early medieval centuries was an open rank, conferred on lineages that had acquired land and armed followers, with genealogies supplied to fit; and that a Pratihara inscription of the earlier ninth century still explains the family's origin through a transitional Brahman-Kshatriya status which an inscription of the next generation has quietly dropped. That is a conquest naturalising itself, caught in stone, in two documents a generation apart.

Nobody today experiences the *varna* order as the residue of a conquest. It is not remembered as one. It has been the furniture of reality for a very long time, which is exactly what a build that took looks like from inside.

So the same country contains a conquest that was completely naturalised and a conquest that has never been allowed to naturalise at all. The difference between them is about a thousand years — and a successor regime that made a project of the remembering, and left the documents in English so that everyone could read them.

Reading the Mughal accounting against the framework

Three refinements.

First: metabolic exposure is a function of what an order built, not of how large it was or how long it lasted. The Mughals ruled somewhere between a hundred and a hundred and fifty million people for two centuries and carry a small metabolic ledger, because the coordination that fed India was not theirs. Rain-fed cropping needed no state; the village, the *jati* order, the artisan shares and the *zamindar* were inherited and untouched; the exit stayed open. **An order that inherits its subsistence system rather than constructing one carries little metabolic debt, and its collapse does not call the note.** The question to ask of any order is therefore not its size or duration but a narrow one: *what did the apex maintain that the harvest depended on?* Where the answer is canals, granaries and enforced distribution, the metabolic ledger will dominate the sword. Where the answer is roads and a currency, it will not.

Second, and this is the contribution: the note can be called by substitution rather than by absence. The framework has treated the metabolic debt as falling due when coordination is *disrupted*. This case shows something worse and less obvious. Mughal coordination was not what fed Bengal, and its disappearance did not starve anybody. What starved Bengal was the arrival of a *different* coordination — one that took the revenue right without the duty to govern, held a fixed cash demand through a harvest failure, and answered to shareholders rather than to a collector instructed to report crop loss on the spot. **A replacement coordination with a different objective function can call a note that the original never issued** — and it is more dangerous than a vacuum, because a vacuum at least stops the extraction.

Third: naturalisation requires elapsed time *and* the absence of a successor with an interest in remembering — and the corollary is a discipline for this module. The same subcontinent holds a fully naturalised conquest and a permanently visible one, separated by a millennium and by the presence of a later regime that made the remembering its business. Which means that before totalling any grim accounting, the researcher must establish **who curated the record of the violence, and why**. This study's own answer is uncomfortable and is stated rather than buried: a large share of its primary material reaches English through a collection assembled by a colonial administrator who wrote down that he intended it to make Indians grateful for British

rule. The documents are real. The selection was made. And the deaths that appear in no such collection — because no successor had a use for them — are not absent from history. They are absent from the ledger, which is not the same thing.

A note on sources. The exact quotations are from public-domain texts. Babur on rain-grown crops and on the pillar of pagan-heads at Chanderi, and his two casualty figures for Panipat, are from Annette Beveridge's translation of the *Bābur-nāma* (1921–22). Bernier on children carried away as slaves for revenue arrears is from the Constable revision of Brock's translation (1891). The *Ain-i-Akbari*'s instructions to the collector on reporting crop loss and making advances are from H. S. Jarrett's translation of Volumes II–III (1891–94). Henry Miers Elliot's statement of purpose is from his original preface to Volume I of *The History of India as Told by Its Own Historians* (1867), quoted here in eighteen words and widely reproduced; the characterisation of the project's selection bias follows Richard M. Eaton and the standard modern assessment.

Contested figures are given as ranges with their provenance, and several are given as unverifiable. Panipat's dead are Babur's own two estimates. Chittor's thirty thousand rests on Mughal chronicle authority alone. The 1630–32 famine mortality — around three million in Gujarat in the ten months to October 1631, perhaps a million more near Ahmadnagar, and a Dutch regional estimate above seven million — comprises mutually inconsistent contemporary observers' estimates, the highest of which is probably too high; the relief figure of five thousand rupees is as reported in the imperial chronicle tradition. Nadir Shah's Delhi massacre is conventionally put at twenty to thirty thousand for a single day and cannot be counted. For the Great Bengal Famine of 1769–70, the figure of about ten million and a third of the population descends from Visaria and Visaria and is the standard citation, but the range in the literature runs as low as one million, and the higher figures are reconstructions rather than counts; the Chalisa famine of 1783–84 and the Doji bara famine of 1791–92 are each conventionally put at around eleven million on figures that are softer still. The attribution of famine mortality to Company revenue policy is actively and politically contested; drought and smallpox were real independent causes, and this study states only the administrative fact that the demand was not relaxed, together with the separation of *diwani* from *nizamat* established in Module 10. Romesh Chunder Dutt's estimate of the share of output absorbed is reported as his.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited: B. D. Chattopadhyaya on the processual origin of Rajput status and the Pratihara inscriptions; Irfan Habib and Shireen Moosvi on wages, prices and the agrarian order; Visaria and Visaria on Bengal's population; Richard M. Eaton on Elliot's purposes; and the standard narratives of the

campaigns, risings and successions cited in Modules 1, 5, 8 and 10. Bhimsen's *Nuskha-i Dilkusha* is named as the eyewitness source for the Deccan years and is not quoted. Every load-bearing fact here is to be re-verified before it is built upon.

MODULE 12

The Door That Could Not Widen

Convergence and divergence — what this case confirms, what it breaks, the single architectural fact from which every one of its virtues and every one of its fatal properties descends; and the strongest case for the Mughal empire, stated at full strength and answered

What eleven modules found

Before comparing, consolidate. The study opened on two orders failing at the same joint — a Timurid world that divided sovereignty among kin until nothing was left large enough to defend, and a Lodi sultanate whose founder sat on a carpet and could not make his nobles stand. It closed on an empire that had solved that joint brilliantly and dissolved anyway.

Between those two points the modules found: a floor of force that took fifty years and was laid by siege engineering rather than by the battle the dynasty dated itself from, because the base could not be pinned and the intermediary could; a settlement in which the form of every grant tracked the replaceability of its holder; a robe that was a sovereignty claim in the vocabulary of piety, cut for several audiences in one city who did not read each other's documents; a formation the empire never attempted, in a field that filled with new formations while it watched; a cost column purchased rather than closed, which broke on the extractor's lease-length rather than on the rate; an extraction that flowed inward and was four-fifths alienated before it moved; an information system superb at looking down and structurally blind looking up; a default built on a positional ledger that could not admit new power without demoting old; a liberty ledger that ran net-foreclosing and whose only durable residue was paperwork; a collapse produced by elite overbreeding, exhaustion, fracture and conquest in that order, with four popular risings crushed on the way; and a grim accounting whose largest entry falls after the arrangement ended.

Now: what does that confirm, what does it break, and what is it a case *of*?

Where it converges

Four of the collection's central propositions come through this case intact, and one of them is confirmed more cleanly here than anywhere.

Structural change comes from the hierarchy. *Elite Chaos* claims this approaches a law, and the Mughal record obliges without a single exception. Four substantial risings

from below — Jats in 1669, Satnamis in 1672, Jats again in the 1680s, Sikhs under Banda Bahadur from 1709 — every one of them destroyed by a functioning floor. What actually ended the arrangement was a nobility that multiplied roughly eightfold in a century against a fund that did not, a war the apex could win and could not finish, a fracture at the top, and rival hierarchies arriving from Persia, the Deccan and London. The pressure from below was a real cause operating on the fisc; it was the proximate agent of nothing.

The counter-elite leads the crowd. Gokula was a *zamindar*. Shivaji was a Bijapur jagirdar's son who ran two *parganas* for his father, and what he built was a hierarchy with forts, a revenue system, a nobility and a purchased coronation. The proof of the difference is that the Jat rising ended with Gokula's execution and the Maratha polity survived Sambhaji's, because an institution can replace a person and a rising cannot.

The expenditure names the audience. Babur remitted a transit duty whose yield was beyond the dreams of avarice, and remitted it only for Muslims, at the moment his army was closest to bolting. Akbar gave up the *jizya* permanently for nothing tangible, at the moment he was binding Rajput houses into the settlement. Jahangir's accession charter raised ranks, soldiers' pay, harem allowances and the holdings of "the army of prayer." In every case the payment identifies the constituency that could withhold, and in every case the payment is more informative than the rhetoric surrounding it.

And the order the conqueror met was itself a naturalised conquest. The *varna* order and the Kshatriya status of the Rajput houses were built, and the building is visible — in a Pratihara inscription of the ninth century that still explains the family's origin through a transitional Brahman-Kshatriya status, and in one from the next generation that has quietly dropped the explanation. That is a conquest becoming furniture, caught in stone.

Where it diverges, and the single fact underneath

The divergences are more interesting, and they are not a list of unrelated peculiarities. Every one of them descends from one architectural fact.

The Mughal empire ruled a country it never entered. It took the top layer, rented the middle, and did not touch the bottom.

Follow it through and every finding of this study falls out of it.

It never entered the base, so the floor of force could not be built against villages and was built against the fortified places of the intermediary layer instead — mines, cast guns and a covered way pushed across open ground at Chittor, rather than the cart-wall that won Panipat.

It never entered the base, so it could not close the cost column. The cultivator's crops were rain-grown, his village could be re-founded in a day and a half, and thorn jungle stood within a walk; his compliance had to be bought with advances, remissions and a demand timed to Holi and Dasahra, and the empire's own manual instructs the collector not to fear that the land will fall waste, which is a government telling its officers to call a bluff it is not sure is a bluff.

It never entered the base, so it never needed the base's belief, so it bought none — no schools system, no conversion project, no imperial formation below the service class. It wrote a curriculum and built wells. And the field it declined to enter filled up, over a century and a half of peace, with formations that outlived it.

It never entered the base, so its extraction had to be routed through people who were already inside the village, which made the *zamindar* indispensable at the moment it made him dangerous, and which is why four rupees in five of the land revenue were alienated before a coin moved.

It never entered the base, so its metabolic exposure was near zero: the coordination that fed India was not Mughal coordination, and when the empire dissolved, the machinery that fed people did not dissolve with it.

And it never entered the base, so when the money ran out there was nothing to hold on to. The successor states kept the titles, the *farmans*, the *khutba* and the coinage and stopped remitting, because an order that is a licensing layer over an intact society can be hollowed out without anyone having to knock it down. The final transfer — the *diwani* of Bengal, granted by *farman* under the emperor's seal in 1765 — was possible precisely because there was no longer anything at the centre worth seizing.

Two further divergences follow from a second fact, which is that the conquerors had nowhere to go home to.

There was no metropole, and Babur said so before anyone else could: Kabul and Qandahar and Badakhshan brought *"no reckonable profit,"* and *"Was it for us to remain in Kābul, the sport of harsh poverty?"* So the treasure of Delhi and Agra was distributed within three weeks — to the army by tribe, to the traders and students, to relations abroad, to shrines in Samarkand and Mecca, and a *shahrukhi* to every soul in Kabul, man and woman, bond and free. Nothing was remitted because there was nowhere to remit to.

Which means the framework's colonial apparatus — the seam split by an ocean, the robe cut for a distant taxpayer, the extraction flowing outward — is simply absent, and the case shows what the variable underneath it actually was. Not distance. *Whose belief is paying for the conquest.* Where the extracting class emigrates permanently and spends where it collects, extraction becomes internal redistribution, the world's silver flows in

and stays, and the seam runs not between continents but between audiences living a few miles apart in one capital: the *ulama* told the empire propagated Islam, the Rajput chief shown a sovereign taking *darshan* at a window, and nineteen initiates swearing away property, life, honour and religion. What held them apart was not geography but the fact that they did not read each other's documents — and the one man who stood at every address wrote it all down in secret and hid the manuscript until he was dead.

The door

Which brings the comparison this module is named for.

Rome's answer to the problem of an expanding elite was to widen the category. Citizenship spread outward from the city to Italy, to the provinces, to the auxiliaries, until in 212 it was granted to nearly everyone free in the empire and the distinction it had once marked dissolved. The Gauls became, in time, simply Romans; the conquest stopped being a conquest and became a fact about the world. That is what a door that widens does — it eventually stops being a door.

The French, in Algeria, kept a door and would not open it, because to form Algerians as Frenchmen would have been to admit them, and admission carried rights. That is the colonial foreclosure the collection has documented.

The Mughal door was different from both, and the difference is the sharpest single divergence in this study. **It was genuinely open and it could not widen.**

Open: the *mansab* was available to Turanis, Iranis, Afghans, Indian Muslims, Rajputs, Deccanis, Marathas, and to Hindus in numbers — a little over a fifth of the rank-holders across three reigns, Hindu Kayasthas and Khatris taking over the Persian secretariat, a Kachhwaha Rajput commanding imperial armies against another Rajput. There was no conversion requirement, no bar of birth, and after 1564 no poll tax marking the difference. Against the colonial cases this is a remarkable fact and it should not be minimised.

And incapable of widening: because the thing on the other side of the door was a *positional* good. The *mansab* bound the elite by telling every man where he stood relative to every other man, and that only works while the number is believed accurate. So a new power could be admitted only at a rank reflecting its real strength, and every such admission demoted somebody already inside whose adherence depended on his own number being believed. Shivaji stood in the line of the five-thousands behind a man whose forces he had beaten, asked who it was, and walked out — and there was no number the empire could have given him that did not cost it something it could not afford.

That is the structural reason the Mughal door could not do what Rome's did. Rome's citizenship was not positional; extending it to a Gaul took nothing from a Roman. A *mansab* extended to a Maratha took something from a Rajput. **A door that opens onto a ranked queue can admit individuals and can never admit a people**, because the queue has a fixed length and the men already in it are the ones holding the arrangement up.

The empire met that limit three times in forty years and failed it three times: the Marathas, whose rank was a lie; the Rathores, whose hereditary exception was revoked in the name of applying the general rule; and its own nobility, which doubled while the fund did not, until the ranks were paper. Three failures, one mechanism.

Two ways to lose an elite

One comparison inside the collection is worth making explicitly, because the two cases are symmetrical and both are in the project.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth gave its nobility everything: heritable estates, jurisdiction, election of the king, and eventually an individual veto over the legislature. That settlement could not be moved by the apex at all, and the state was paralysed and then partitioned by neighbours who could act.

The Mughals gave their nobility nothing heritable whatever: rank issued by the emperor and lapsing at death, assignments rotated so no man could root himself, estates reclaimed to settle accounts. As Bernier saw, deprived of the pension they *"sink at once into utter insignificance."* That settlement could be moved by the apex entirely — the war of 1657 was fought by the whole military elite of a subcontinent without anyone proposing to change the system — and it dissolved the moment the apex could no longer pay, because nobody in it had anything to defend except a claim on a bankrupt.

A settlement that concedes too much to the elite cannot act; a settlement that concedes too little cannot survive its own insolvency. And Module 9 supplies the corollary that connects this to the liberty question: an elite with nothing heritable has nothing to bargain with, which is why almost no protective residue accreted in two centuries, and why what did accrete came from a scribal practice in the *qazi*'s courts rather than from any charter. Poland's nobles won liberties and wrecked the state with them. India's nobles won none and had no purchase when the state wrecked itself.

What this study contributes

Gathered from the closing sections of the eleven modules, the contributions this case makes to the framework are these, in the order they were earned.

The seat question should be asked layer by layer and recorded as a profile, because a country's answer differs at each depth — a vacant seat at the top, occupied hereditary seats in the middle, no seat at all at the bottom.

Where the base can run and the middle cannot, the floor is built against the fortified places of the intermediary layer, and the diagnostic instrument is the siege train rather than the field army.

Establish the genre of a founding document before reading its claims; a victory despatch is a template filled in, and its distribution list is better evidence of the audience than its rhetoric is of the writer.

The form of a grant tracks the replaceability of the holder — so read a settlement for its exceptions before its rules, because the rule states the apex's preference and the exception states its limit.

An order forms only the populations whose belief its extraction requires; and an unentered formation field is fertile ground, not static ground.

Where the exit is open, compliance is purchased, and the price is legible in the order's own operating manuals; and the cost column breaks on the extractor's tenure rather than on the rate.

The share of revenue the centre never touches matters more than the total; and monetising a demand manufactures a new class of irreplaceable intermediaries.

Edicts measure intention; the interval between the enforcer's departure and the resumption of the practice measures power.

A default is strongest when the elite's status good is apex-issued, worthless outside, and positional — and a positional ledger has a fixed capacity, which is where such an order eventually fractures.

Distinguish an appeal apparatus from a protection, and treat the first with suspicion; a right that must be granted again at each accession is a favour; and where no faction can win a right, the durable substitute is a record the next regime finds cheaper to accept than to reopen.

A settlement can fracture without anyone repudiating it, so ask who has stopped remitting rather than who has declared independence.

Metabolic exposure is a function of what the apex maintained that the harvest depended on; and the note can be called by a replacement coordination with a different objective function, not only by an absence.

And, before totalling any grim accounting, establish who curated the record of the violence, and why.

One correction should be recorded against the project brief, which predicted that a conquest of this kind would run on force and surveillance because its belief never took with the conquered. The prediction was half right and the half it got wrong is instructive. The Mughals did run an elaborate surveillance apparatus — fourteen recorders, a *waqi'a-navis* in every province, monthly returns on prices and rebels and the destitute poor, branded horses and descriptive rolls of every trooper. But it was aimed almost entirely at the empire's *own elite*, not at the population. The peasantry was barely watched, because the empire had never sought its belief and did not need its compliance in any form that watching would have secured. **Surveillance is indeed the tell of a belief that never took — and the direction it points identifies which population the belief failed with.** Here it points at the nobility.

The counter-position, stated at full strength

Now the case for the Mughal empire, made as its best defenders would make it, without hedging.

For roughly a century and a half a fifth of the world's population lived under the longest internal peace northern India had known since the Guptas. The number of people who could plunder a village in the Doab was reduced from several hundred lordships to very nearly one. A silver coinage of exceptional reliability monetised the countryside, and the world's demand for Indian cloth pulled the silver of two hemispheres into it, so that India held a share of global manufacturing that it would not see again. Real wages for an unskilled labourer in 1595 were higher than at any point over the following three centuries — a fact established not by imperial propaganda but by economic historians hostile to imperial propaganda, working from the empire's own wage and price schedules.

The revenue system was the most sophisticated on earth, assessed on measured land from ten-year averages of yield and price, with remission procedures for crop failure and advances for seed and cattle written into the manual. The empire abolished the pilgrim tax in 1563 and the *jizya* in 1564 — surrendering permanently a levy that had marked non-Muslim status under every Muslim dynasty in India for three and a half centuries — and prohibited the enslavement of prisoners of war. It ran a nobility in which Hindus held better than a fifth of the ranks across three reigns, in which a Rajput commanded the imperial army, and into which Hindu scribal families entered so completely that a Brahman's letter to his son became the standard training text for Muslim and Hindu clerks alike. It translated the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*

into Persian. It produced the Taj Mahal, Fatehpur Sikri, Shahjahanabad and a painting tradition of the first rank.

And it solved the problem that had destroyed every Delhi dynasty for three hundred and twenty years. Every one of them had been formidable for one strong reign and had come apart at the succession; the Mughals held for seven generations, and the wars of succession that look like chaos from outside forced the entire elite into visible commitment once a generation, drove princes into provinces the administration had not reached, and reabsorbed the losers' followings each time.

Set that beside what preceded it — three centuries of dynasties that could not transmit power — and beside what followed it — the eighteenth-century wars and famine mortality in the tens of millions — and the Mughal century is a strong candidate for the best two hundred years northern India had between the Guptas and independence. Judged by the standard this collection insists on, which is comparison with the available alternatives rather than with an imagined ideal, the arrangement delivered.

The answer

Every sentence of that is true and this study has established most of it from the empire's own paperwork. The answer is not a rebuttal, because there is nothing there to rebut. It is three observations that the case for the defence leaves out, and then one that goes deeper than the ledger.

The first is who paid. The peace and the coinage and the buildings were funded by transferring an enormous share of the agrarian surplus to a few thousand families — some eighty-two per cent of assessed revenue resources to around 1,671 rank-holders, upwards of eighteen per cent to the top twelve — collected from cultivators whose demand ran from a third of the crop to a half and beyond, apportioned inside the village by their own neighbours, and enforced by a state that told its collectors to punish the recalcitrant and not to fear that the land would fall waste. The high real wage of 1595 is real and it is also the peak of a curve that fell for two hundred years afterwards.

The second is what was destroyed to buy the tolerance. The *mahzar* of 1579 removed the only institution in the empire with an independent body of law and the standing to tell a sovereign that an act was unlawful — permanently, in the ulama's own vocabulary, on their own proof-texts, with their signatures at the foot. The abolition of the *jizya* and the subordination of the *ulama* were not two policies, one high-minded and one hard-headed; they were one manoeuvre seen from two sides.

Which is precisely why the tolerance could be reversed in a decade by a successor using the same machinery, and why nothing stood in his way when he did.

The third is what was never attempted. In two centuries over something between a hundred and a hundred and fifty million people, the empire made no attempt to form anybody outside its own service class — and this was not cruelty but arithmetic, because nothing in the machine ran on the base's conviction. The consequence was that a continental formation field lay open, and the long peace was exactly the condition in which new formations could be built in it slowly enough to become furniture before anyone at the apex noticed. The two powers that occupied the empire's last century were carried by formations that crystallised under Mughal rule.

And then the observation that goes deeper, which is the finding this study would offer if it could offer only one.

The achievement and the failure are the same fact. The Mughal empire was magnificent *because* it was thin. It did not have to convert, absorb, level or form; it could take the top layer, rent the middle and leave the bottom alone, and it was that thinness which made it cheap enough to be prosperous and secure enough to be tolerant. An order that must remake its subjects cannot afford *sulh-i kul*. An order that only has to be paid can.

And an order that has entered nothing has nothing to hold on to when the money stops. The same architecture that permitted a Rajput to command imperial armies and a Brahman to write the manual for Muslim clerks also meant that when the ranks became paper, the men holding them walked away to Awadh and Bengal and the Deccan, kept every form, and stopped remitting — and that when a trading company wanted the richest revenue province in Asia, it did not need to depose anybody. It took the *diwani* by *farman*, under the emperor's seal, and paid him a pension, because four-fifths of the revenue had never passed through his hands in the first place.

So the honest verdict has to hold both halves without letting either dissolve the other. The empire's tolerance was real and was not a mask; the men who abolished the *jizya* and translated the *Mahabharata* meant it, and Abu'l Fazl's account of a sovereignty above all sects is a serious idea seriously held. And that same sovereignty was a claim that removed every check on itself, cut for audiences who were not permitted to compare notes, and resting on a settlement in which no one below the emperor owned anything he could defend. The self-justification — the divine light communicated without the intermediate assistance of any one — should not be swallowed. The achievement it decorated should not be denied.

What the Mughals built was the most successful thin order in the early modern world, and it lasted seven generations, which is six longer than anything that had

preceded it in that country. It could not widen its door, because the door opened onto a queue. And when the queue ran out of places, the men standing in it did what the arrangement had always relied on them doing: each defended his own position — which, on that day, meant leaving.

A note on sources. This module rests on the primary and secondary sources established in Modules 1 to 11 and introduces no new evidence; each quotation reproduced here is documented in the module where it was first used, with the cautions given there. In summary: Babur is quoted from Annette Beveridge's translation of the *Bābur-nāma* (1921–22); Bernier from the Constable revision of Brock (1891); Abu'l Fazl from Blochmann's and Jarrett's translations of the *Ain-i-Akbari* (1873, 1891–94); Bada'uni from Lowe (1884); Jahangir from Rogers and Beveridge (1909); and the *Tarikh-i Daudi* and Khafi Khan from Elliot and Dowson (1872, 1877), whose stated purpose and consequent selection bias are set out in Module 11 and apply to every use made of them in this study.

Modern scholarship paraphrased and credited across the study includes Peter Jackson and Sunil Kumar on the Delhi Sultanate; B. D. Chattopadhyaya on Rajput origins; Irfan Habib, Shireen Moosvi, M. Athar Ali and A. Jan Qaisar on the agrarian and fiscal systems and the nobility; Muzaffar Alam on Persian and the *munshis*; Richard M. Eaton on shrine-centred settlement and on Elliot; John F. Richards and Jos Gommans on the state and its warfare; A. Azfar Moin on sacred kingship; Munis D. Faruqui on the princely institution; Nandini Chatterjee, Farhat Hasan and Abhishek Kaicker on law, property and popular politics; and Broadberry and Gupta with Moosvi on long-run real wages. Where these authorities disagree — on the *jagirdari* crisis, on the scale of the eighteenth-century famines, on the interpretation of Aurangzeb's religious measures, on the generalisability of regional *qazi*-court archives — the disagreement is reported in the relevant module and is not resolved here.

The comparisons drawn in this module to Rome's extension of citizenship, to the Polish-Lithuanian noble settlement, and to the colonial cases in this collection are offered as structural comparisons on well-established general facts, not as summaries of the other studies' findings, which stand on their own evidence. The framework applied throughout is Thomas J. Bryan's, in *Above Warlordism*, *The Machine That Runs Itself*, *The Architect and the Inheritor*, *The Exploit*, *Position Logic*, *Elite Chaos* and the *Patterns of Power Field Manual*. Every load-bearing fact in this study is to be re-verified before it is built upon.